LAUGHING LAST

JANE D. ABBOTT

Anne Bourne

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BY

JANE ABBOTT

AUTHOR OF

HIGHACRES, KEINETH, RED ROBIN, ETC.

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TO

FRANCES STANTON SMITH

WHOSE LOYAL INTEREST IN MY WORK IS AN UNFAILING HELP TO ME, I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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LAUGHING LAST

CHAPTER I

THE EGG

"I BEG your pardon, but it's *my* turn to have the Egg!"

Three pairs of eyes swept to the sunny window seat from which vantage-ground Sidney Romley had thrown her protest. Three mouths gaped.

"*Yours*—"

"Why, Sid—"

"Fifteen-year-olders don't have turns!" laughed Victoria Romley, who was nineteen and very grown up.

Though inwardly Sidney writhed, outwardly she maintained a calm firmness. The better to impress her point she uncurled herself from the cushions and straightened to her fullest height.

"It's because I *am* fifteen that I am claiming my rights," she answered, carefully ignoring Vicky's laughing eyes. "Each one of you has had the Egg twice and I've never had a cent of it—"

"Sid, you forget I bought a rug when it was my last turn and you enjoy that as much as I do," broke in her oldest sister.

Sidney waved her hand impatiently. She had

rehearsed this scene in the privacy of her attic retreat and she could not be deflected by mention of rugs and things. She must keep to the heart of the issue.

"It's the principle of the thing," she continued, loftily. "We're always fair with one another and give and take and all that, and I think it'd be a blot on our honor if you refused me my lawful turn at the Egg. I'm willing to overlook each one of you having it twice."

"That's kind of you. What would you do with it, anyway, kid?" interrupted Vicky, quite unimpressed by her sister's seriousness. She let a chuckle in her voice denote how amused she was.

Sidney flashed a withering look in Vicky's direction.

"I wouldn't spend it all on one party that's over in a minute and nothing to show for it!" she retorted. Then: "And what I'd do with it is my own affair!" She swallowed to control a sob that rose in her throat.

"Tut! Tut!" breathed the tormenting Vicky.

"Why, Sid, dear!" cried Trude, astonished. She put a tray of dishes that she was carrying to the kitchen down upon the old sideboard and turned to face Sid. At the tone of her voice Sidney flew to her and flung her arms about her.

"I don't care—I don't *care!* You can laugh at me but I'm *sick* of being different. I—I want to do things like—other girls do. H-have fun—"

Over her head Trude's eyes implored the others to be gentle. She herself was greatly disturbed. Even Vicky grew sober. In a twinkling this lanky, pig-tailed little sister seemed to have become an individual with whom they must reckon. They had never suspected but that she was as contented with her happy-go-lucky way as any petted kitten.

Isolde, the oldest sister, frowned perplexedly.

"Sidney, stop crying and tell us what you want. As far as *fun* is concerned I don't think you have any complaint. Certainly you do not have anything to *worry* about!" Isolde's tone conveyed that she did.

"If it's just the Egg that's bothering you, why, take it!" cried Vicky, magnanimously.

Only Trude sensed that the cause of Sidney's rebellion lay deeper than any desire for fun. She was not unaware of certain dissatisfactions that smoldered in her own breast. The knowledge of them helped her to understand Sidney's mood. She patted the girl's head sympathetically.

"I guess we haven't realized you're growing up, Sid," she laughed softly. "Now brace up and tell us what's wrong with everything."

Trude's quiet words poured balm on Sidney's soul. At last—at *last* these three sisters realized she was fifteen. It *hadn't* been the Egg itself she had wanted—it had been to have them reckon her in on

their absurd family cogitations. She drew the sleeve of her blouse across her eyes and faced them.

"I want to go somewhere, to live somewhere where I won't be Joseph Romley's daughter! I want to wear clothes like the other girls and go to a boarding school and never set eyes on a book of poetry. I want adventure and to do exciting things. I want—"

Isolde stemmed the outpour with a shocked rebuke.

"Sid, I don't think you realize how disrespectful what you are saying is to our father's memory! He has left us something that is far greater than wealth. A great many girls would gladly change places with you and enjoy being the daughter of a poet—"

"Oh, tush!" Quite unexpectedly Sidney found an ally in Vicky. "Issy, you've acted your part so often, poor dear, that you really think we *are* blessed by the gods in having been born to a poet. And poor as church mice! I wish someone *would* change places with me long enough for me to eat a few meals without hearing you and Trude talk about how much flour costs and how we're going to pay the milk bill. Yes, a *fine* heritage! Poor Dad, he couldn't help being a poet, but I'll bet he wishes now he'd been a plasterer or something like that—for *our* sakes, of course. I'm not kicking, I'm as game as you are, and I'm willing to carry on about Dad's memory and all

that—it's the least *we* can do in return for what the League's done for us, but just among ourselves we might enjoy the emotion of sighing for the things other girls do and have, mightn't we?"

Sidney had certainly started something! The very atmosphere of the familiar room in which they were assembled seemed charged with strange currents. Never had any family council taken such a tone. Sidney thrilled to the knowledge that she was now a vital part of it. Her eyes, so recently wet, brightened and her cheeks flushed. So interested was she in what Issy would answer to Vick that she ignored the opening Vick had made for her.

But it was Trude who answered Vicky—Trude, the peaceful.

"Come! Come! First thing we know we'll actually be feeling sorry for ourselves! I sometimes get awfully tired living up to Dad's greatness, but I don't think that's being disrespectful to his memory. I don't suppose there are any girls, even rich ones, who don't sigh for something they haven't. But just to stiffen our spines let's sum up our assets. We're not quite as poor as church mice; we have this old house that isn't half bad, even if the roof does leak, and the government bonds and the royalties and living the way we had to live with Dad taught us to have fun among ourselves which is something! We're not dependent upon outsiders for *that*. You, Issy, have your personality which will get you any-

where you want to go. And Vick's better dressed on nothing than any girl in Middletown. We older girls do have a little more than Sid, so I vote she has the Egg this time all to herself to do exactly as she pleases with it—go 'round the world in search of adventure or any old thing. How's that, family?"

The tension that had held the little circle broke under Trude's practical cheeriness. Isolde smiled. Vick liked being told she looked well-dressed, she worked hard enough to merit that distinction. Sid had the promise of the Egg, which, be it known, was the royalty accruing each year from a collection of whimsical verse entitled "Goosefeathers" and which these absurd daughters of a great but improvident man set aside from the other royalties to be spent prodigally by each in turn.

"I'm quite willing," Isolde conceded. "I was going to suggest that we agree to use it this time to fix the roof where it leaks but if Sid's heart is set on it—"

"It would have been my turn—that is not counting Sid," Vick reminded them, "and I'd have used it having that fur coat Godmother Jocelyn sent me made over. But let the roof leak and the coat go—little Sid must have her fling! I hope you're happy now, kid. What will you really do with all that money?"

At no time had Sidney definitely considered such

a question. Her point won she found herself embarrassed by victory. She evaded a direct answer.

"I won't tell, now!"

"Oh—ho, mysterious! Well, there won't be so much that you'll hurt yourself in your youthful extravagance. Now that this momentous *affaire de famille* is settled, what are you girls going to do this morning?"

"As soon as these dishes are out of the way I'm going to trim that vine on the front wall. It's disgustingly scraggly."

"Oh, Trude—you *can't!* You forget—*it's Saturday!*"

Trude groaned. Vicky laughed naughtily. Saturday—that was the day of the week which the Middletown Branch of the League of American Poets kept for the privilege of taking visitors to the home of Joseph Romley, the poet. In a little while they would begin to come, in twos and threes and larger groups. First they'd stand outside and look at the old house from every angle. They would say to the strangers who were visiting the shrine for the first time: "No, the house wasn't in his family but Joseph Romley made it peculiarly his; it's as though his ancestors had lived there for generations —nothing has been changed—that west room with the bay window was his study—yes, his desk is there and his pencils and pens—just as he left them —even his old house jacket—of course we can go

in—our League paid off the mortgage as a memorial and we have Saturday as a visiting day—there are four girls, most interesting types, but Isolde, the oldest, is the only one of them who is at all like the great poet—"

They would come in slowly, reverently. Isolde, in a straight smock of some vivid color, with a fillet about the cloudy hair that framed her thin face like a curtain, would meet them at the door of the study. She would shake hands with them and answer their awkward questions in her slow drawl which always ended in a minor note. They would look at Isolde much more closely than at the desk and the pens and pencils and the old swivel chair and the faded cushion. On their way out they'd peep inquisitively into the front room with its long windows, bared to the light and the floor looking dustier for the new rug, and the two faded, deep chairs near the old piano. They would see the dust and the bareness but they wouldn't know how gloriously, at sunset time, the flame of the sky lighted every corner of the spacious room or what jolly fires could crackle on the deep hearth or what fun it was to cuddle in the old chairs—they could hold four—while Vicky's clever fingers raced over the cracked ivory keys in her improvisations that sometimes set them roaring with laughter and sometimes brought mist to their eyes. The intruders would find some way to look into the dining room which for the girls was

living room and sewing room, too, and they'd say: "How quaint everything is! These old houses have *so* much atmosphere;" when in their hearts they'd be thinking about the shabbiness of everything and they'd be rejoicing that *their* fathers and husbands were not poets! Vicky claimed to have heard one sacrilegious young creature, plainly on a honeymoon, exclaim: "I'm glad I'm not a poet's daughter and have to live in that old sepulcher! Give me obscurity in a steam-heated three bathroom apartment, any day!"

Of course there could be no trimming the vines and Trude's fingers itched for the task—not so much that she minded the unkempt growth as that she longed to be active out-of-doors. She had planned to plant another row of beans, too. The girls wouldn't poke fun at her when they ate fresh vegetables right out of a garden all of their own! But the ladies of the League must not find her, earth-stained and disheveled, in the garden on Saturday!

"I'll have to change my dress. I forgot it was Saturday when I put this old thing on."

"Vick, dear, you haven't taken your sketching things from Dad's desk," admonished Isolde a little frightenedly and Vicky jumped with a low whistle. "Good gracious! What if a High Lady Leaguer found *my* truck on that sacred shrine!" She rushed off to the study.

Trude having gone kitchenward with her dishes,

Isolde and Sidney faced one another. Sidney grew awkwardly aware of a constraint in her sister's manner. She was regarding her with a curious hardness in her grave eyes.

"You said you were sick of being different!" Isolde made Sidney's words sound childish. "Well—I don't know just how you can escape it—any more than the rest of us can. Look at me—look at Trude—" Then she shut her lips abruptly over what she had started to say. "What had you planned to do this morning, Sid?"

"I told Nancy Stevens I'd go swimming with her though I don't much care whether I go or not."

"Well—as long as you *have* claimed a share in our little scheme of life, kitten—perhaps *you'd* better receive the League visitors this morning. I have some letters to write and I want to dye that old silk. Don't forget to enter the date in the register!"

With which astounding command Isolde walked slowly out of the room leaving Sidney with a baffled sense of—in spite of the promise of the Egg—having been robbed of something.

CHAPTER II

REBELLION

Not the least of the dissatisfactions that had grown in Sidney's breast was belonging to an Estate.

Since the death of Joseph Romley four years earlier, the royalties from his published verse and the government bonds and the oil stock, that had never paid any dividend but might any year, and the four young daughters were managed by two trustees who had been college friends of the poet and who, even in his lifetime, had managed what of his affairs had had any managing. One was a banker and one was a lawyer and they lived in New York, making only rare visits to Middletown. They considered it far better for Isolde and Trude to visit them twice a year and to such an arrangement both older girls were quite agreeable.

But Sidney, knowing the Trustees only as two brusque busy men who talked rapidly and called her "mouse" and "youngster" and brought her childish presents and huge boxes of candy which never contained her favorite chocolate alligators, found them embarrassingly lacking in the dramatic qualities a "guardian," to be of any value to a girl, should possess. Nor did they ever bother their heads in the least as to what *she* did or didn't do! In fact

no one did. There seemed to be only one law that controlled her and everything in the big old house—what one could *afford* to do! She disliked the word.

She resented, too, the Middletown Branch of the League of American Poets. This was a band of women and a scattering of men who had pledged to foster the art of verse-making; a few of them really wrote poetry, a few more understood it, the greater number belonged to the League as Associates. Before Joseph Romley's death Sidney had thought them only very funny because her father and Trude and Isolde thought them funny. There had been then a great timidity in their approach. They had seemed to tremble in their adoring gratitude for a hastily scrawled autograph; they had sometimes knocked at the back door and with deep apologies asked if they might slip in *very* quietly and take a time exposure of THE desk where Joseph Romley worked. They brought senseless gifts which they left unobtrusively on the piano or the hall rack. They dragged their own daughters to the old house for awkwardly formal calls upon Isolde and Trude. But after her father's death even Sidney realized that the League ladies were different. They were not shy any more, they swooped down upon the little household and cleaned and baked and sewed and "deared" the four girls, actually almost living in the house. Isolde and Trude had made no protest and had gone around with troubled faces and had talked far into the nights

in the bed which they shared. Then one morning at breakfast Isolde had announced: "The League has paid the mortgage on this house so that we can keep our home here. It is very good of them—I'm sure I don't know where we could have gone. We must show them how grateful we are." And Sidney had come to know, by example and the rebukes cast her way by Isolde, that "showing them" meant living, not as *they* might want to live—but as the League expected the four daughters of a great poet to live. *That* was the price for the mortgage. The League wanted to say possessively: "This is Joseph Romley's second daughter" or "That is our lamb who was only ten months old when the poor mother died. I am sure the great man would not have known what to do if it had not been for old Huldah Mueller who stayed on and took care of the house and the children for him. He wrote a sonnet to Huldah once. It was worth a month's wages to the woman—" And the League had bought its right to that possessive tone. Sidney, when Isolde could not see, indulged in naughty faces behind stout Mrs. Milliken's back and confided to her chum, Nancy Stevens, the story of how Dad had once, in a rage of impatience, called down to the adoring Mrs. Milliken, waiting in the hall for an autograph: "Madam, if you don't go off at once and leave me alone I'll come down to you in my pajamas! I tell

you I've gone to bed." Oh, Mrs. Milliken had fled *then!*

Sidney had to go to Miss Downs' stupid private day school when she would have preferred the Middletown High (as long as she could not go away to a boarding school), simply because Miss Downs was one of the directors of the League and gave her her tuition as a scholarship.

But Sidney had never thought—until Isolde had spoken so strangely a moment before—that her sisters minded either the Trustees or the League or having to be "different." Isolde naturally was everything the League wanted her to be, with her grave eyes and her cloudy hair with the becoming fillets and her drawling voice and her clever smocks. Trude always wanted to oblige everyone anyway, and Vicky was so pretty that it didn't make any difference what she did. Sidney had considered that she was alone in her rebellion, a rebellion that had flamed in her outburst of the morning: "I'm *sick* of being different!"

Isolde's words of a moment before, with their hard hint of some portentous meaning, started a train of thought now in Sidney's mind that drove away all joy in the promise of the next Egg, that made her even forget her dislike of the duty Isolde had so unexpectedly put upon her. Isolde had said distinctly: "You can't get away from it—look at *me* —look at *Trude!*" And it had sounded queer, bit-

ter, as though somewhere down deep in her Isolde nursed an unhappy feeling about something. Sidney pondered, lingering in the deserted dining room. Maybe, after all, Isolde did not like being the daughter of a poet and her smocks and her fillets and all the luncheons and teas to which she had to go and the speeches of appreciation she had to make. And what did Trude dislike? She always *seemed* happy but maybe *she* wanted something. Sidney remembered once hearing Trude cry terribly hard in the study. She and Dad had been talking at dinner about college. They had come to the door of the study and Dad had said: "It can't be done, sonny." That's what Dad had always called Trude because she was the boy of the family. Trude had come out with her face all shiny with tears and her father had stood on the threshold of the door with his hair rumpled and his nose twitching the way it did when something bothered him. That was probably it. Trude had wanted college. That seemed silly to Sidney who hated lessons, at least the kind Miss Downs gave, but it was too bad to have good old Trude, who was such a peach, want anything.

Isolde hadn't included Vicky, but then Vicky *couldn't* want anything. She wasn't afraid to fly in the faces of the Trustees and the whole League and they wouldn't mind if she did. She was as clever as she was pretty. She could take the old dresses which Mrs. Custer and Mrs. White, the Trustees'

wives, and Mrs. Deering whom Isolde had visited in Chicago, and Godmother Jocelyn sent every now and then and make the stunningest new dresses. And once an artist from New York had painted her portrait and exhibited it in Paris and had won a medal for it. The League ladies approved of that and always told of it.

Vicky had whole processions of beaux who came and crowded in the chairs in the front room or sat on the broad window sills of the open windows smoking while she talked to them or played for them. Isolde's few beaux were not noisy and jolly like Vick's—they all looked as though the League might have picked them out from some assortment. They usually read to Isolde verses of their own or made her read them some of Dad's. Maybe, Sidney's thoughts shot out at a new angle—maybe Isolde did not like beaux who were poets, liked Vick's kind of men better.

Trude had only one beau and Sidney had never seen him because Trude had had him when she was visiting Aunt Edith White. Trude and Isolde had whispered a great deal about him and Trude had let Isolde read his letters. Then a letter had come that had made Trude look all queer and white and Isolde, after she had read it, had gone to Trude and put her arms around her neck and Isolde only did a thing like that when something dreadful happened. Sidney had hoped that she might find the letter lying around

somewhere so carelessly that she could be pardoned for reading it, but though she had looked everywhere she had never found it. She had had to piece together Trude's romance from the fabric of her agile imagination.

Sidney had often tried to make herself hate the old house. Though it was a jolly, rambly place it was so very down-at-the heels and the light that poured in through the windows made things look even barer and shabbier. Nancy Stevens lived in one of the new bungalows near the school and it was beautiful with shiny furniture and rugs that felt like woolly bed slippers under one's tread and two pairs of curtains at each window and Nancy's own room was all pink even to the ruffled stuff hung over her bed like a tent. But Sidney had once heard Mrs. Milliken say to Isolde: "I hope, dear girl, that you will not be tempted to change this fine old house in *any* way—to leave it just as your father lived in it is the greatest tribute we can pay to his memory." After that Sidney knew there was no use hinting for even *one* pair of curtains. But her sisters had seemed quite contented.

There had been a disturbing ring of finality to Isolde's, "You can't get away from it," that seemed almost to slap Sidney in the face. Would they *always* —at least she and Isolde and Trude, Vick would manage to escape someway—be bound down there in the "quaint" bare house with the Trustees sending

their skimpy allowances and long letters of advice and the ladies of the League of Poets coming and going and owning them body and soul? What was to prevent such a fate? They didn't have money enough to just say—"Dear ladies, take the old house and the desk and the pens and pencils and the old coat—they're yours—" and run away and do what they pleased; probably a whole dozen of Eggs would not get them anywhere!

"What are you doing mooning there in the window?" cried Vick from the open door. Her arms were filled with a litter of boxes and old portfolios. "Where's Isolde? I want her to know I dusted things in the study."

"Isolde's writing letters. Then she's going to dye something."

"On Saturday!"

"Yes. *I'm* going to receive the League visitors today."

"You!" Victoria went off into such a peal of laughter that she had to lean against the door frame. "Oh—how funny! What's *ever* in the air today."

"I don't know why it's so funny. I'm—"

"Fifteen. So you are. But bless me, child, the Leaguers will never accept you in a middy blouse and pigtails. What's Isolde *thinking* of? And you look *much* too plump! Now—" But Sidney stalked haughtily past her tormenter into the hall.

Vick's bantering, however, had stung her. The

old clock on the stair landing chiming out the approaching hour of the League visitors warned Sidney that there was not time to change her middy with its faded collar; nor to wind the despised pigtails, around her head in the fashion Mrs. Milliken called "So beautifully quaint." Anyway, if there were all the time in the world she would not do it. She'd begin right now being her own self and not something the League wanted her to be because she was a poet's daughter! Isolde and Trude might yield weakly to their fate but she would be strong. Perhaps, some day, she would rescue them—even Vicky!

But as an unmistakable wave of chattering from without struck her ear her fine defiance deserted her. She ran to the door and peeped through one of the narrow windows that framed the door on either side.

At the gate stood Mrs. Milliken and a strange woman. Behind them, in twos, stretched a long queue of girls—girls of about her own age. They wore trim serge dresses with white collars, all alike. They carried notebooks in their hands. They leaned toward one another, whispering, giggling.

Sidney's heart gave a tremendous bound. It was most certainly a boarding school! It was the nearest she had ever been to one! She forgot her middy and the hated pigtails, and the dread of the League. She threw open the door. Mrs. Milliken's voice came to her: "He died on April tenth, Nineteen

eighteen. He had just written that sonnet to the West Wind. You know it I am sure. He bought this house when he came to Middletown but he made it his as though he'd lived in it all his life—we have left it *exactly* as it was when he was with us—our committee——"

They came walking slowly toward the house, Mrs. Milliken and the strange woman with reverent mien, the wriggling queue still whispering and giggling.

CHAPTER III

POLA LIFTS A CURTAIN

"WHERE *is* Isolde?" Mrs. Milliken whispered between her "Note the gracious proportions of this hall" and "Joseph Romley would never allow himself to be crowded with possessions."

"She's—she's—" Sidney had a sudden instinct to protect Isolde. "She has—a headache."

"I am *so* sorry that I cannot introduce you to Isolde Romley—the poet's oldest daughter," Mrs. Milliken pitched her voice so that it might reach even to the girls crowding into the front door. "She is a *most* interesting and delightful and unusual young lady. She was always closely associated with her gifted father and we feel that she is growing to be very like him. *This*—" smiling affectionately at Sidney and allowing a suggestion of apology to creep into her tone, "This is just our little Sidney, the poet's baby-girl. Sidney, lamb, this is Miss Byers of Grace Hall, a boarding school for young ladies and these are her precious charges. They are making a pilgrimage to our beloved shrine—" Sidney, too familiar with Mrs. Milliken's flowery phrases to be embarrassed by them, faced a little frightenedly the eyes that stared curiously at her from above the spotless collars.

"We will go right into the study," Mrs. Milliken advised Miss Byers. "We can take the girls in in little groups. As poor Isolde is not here I will tell them some of the precious and personal anecdotes of the great poet. You know we, in Middletown—especially of the League—feel very privileged to have lived so close to him—"

Miss Byers briskly marshalled the first eight girls into the small study. The others broke file and crowded into the front room and on to the stairs, some even spilled over into the dining room. They paid not the slightest attention to anything about them. Assured that Miss Byers was out of hearing they burst into excited chatter and laughter. Except for one or two who smiled shyly at her they did not even notice Sidney.

Sidney, relieved that Mrs. Milliken did not expect *her* to recite the "precious and personal anecdotes," drew back into a corner from where she could enjoy to its fullest measure the delight of such close propinquity to real boarding-school girls. Their talk, broken by smothered shrieks of laughter, rang like sweetest music to her. They seemed so jolly. Their blue serges and white collars were so stylish. She wondered where they all came from and whether they had "scrapes" at Grace Hall.

The first eight girls filed back into the hall from the study and Miss Byers motioned eight more to enter. There was a general stirring, then the chatter

swelled again. Presently a girl slipped into Sidney's corner and dropped down upon a chair.

"Isn't this the *stupidest* bore!" she groaned. Then looking at Sidney, she gasped and laughed. "Say—I *beg* your pardon. I thought you were one of the girls. And you're—you're—the poet's daughter, aren't you?" The slanting dove-gray eyes above the white collar actually softened with sympathy.

Sidney thought this young creature the very prettiest girl—next to Vicky—she had ever seen. She did not mind her pity. The stranger had taken her for "one of the girls" and Sidney would have forgiven her anything for that!

"I suppose it is a bore. Isn't it fun, though, just going places?"

The boarding school girl stared. "Oh, we go so *much*. There isn't a big gun anywhere within a radius of five hundred miles that we don't have to visit. We get autographs and listen to speeches and make notes about graves and look at pictures. Most of the girls get a kick out of it slipping in some gore behind Byers' back—but I don't. I travel so much with my family that nothing seems awfully exciting now."

Sidney wished she'd say that over again—it sounded so unbelievable. And the girl couldn't be any older than she was. She was conscious that the slanting eyes were regarding her closely.

"Do you like living here and having a lot of

people tramp all over your house and stare at you and say things about you and poke at your father's things?"

It was plain magic the way this stranger put her finger directly upon the sore spot.

"No, I don't!" vehemently.

"*I'd* hate it, too. And I suppose you always have to act like a poet's daughter, don't you? Do you have to write poetry yourself?"

"No, I loathe poetry!"

"But I'll bet you don't dare say so when that Dame in there can hear you! I have to be careful talking about candy. My father makes the Betty Sweets. Don't you know them? They're sold all over the world. We have an immense factory. And there isn't any other kind of candy that I don't like better. But I don't dare tell anybody that. Funny, I'm telling you! Our spirits must be drawn together by some invisible bond."

Sidney's ears fairly ached with the beauty of the other's words. She stiffened her slender little body to control its trembling. She tried to say something but found her throat choked. The other girl rattled on:

"I didn't take any notes. I'll copy my roommate's. You see we have to write a theme about our visit. Miss Byers prides herself on the girls of Grace being so well-informed. I know. I'll put you into it. That'll be fun. Only you'll have to tell me something

about yourself. How old are you? Do you go to a regular school and play with other girls like any ordinary girl?"

Sidney flushed at the other's manner and found her tongue in an instinctive desire to defend her lot.

"Of course I go to school. It's sort of a boarding school, only all the girls go home nights. And I do everything the others do. And I am fifteen."

"I didn't mean to offend you. I thought perhaps a poet's daughter was different. If you don't mind in my theme I'll *make* you different—pale and thin, with curly hair in a cloud, and faraway eyes—"

"That's like Isolde, my oldest sister, the one who usually tells the 'precious and personal anecdotes.' I wasn't really offended—and I'll admit most of the girls do treat me a little bit differently—but that's Miss Downs' fault; she won't let them forget that I am Joseph Romley's daughter. She uses it all the time in her catalogue and when any visitors come to the school it's dreadful—"

"If you don't like it why don't you come to Grace Hall? We'd have no end of fun—"

"Gracious, I've never been *any*where. I only go to Miss Downs' because it's here at Middletown and because she gives me my tuition on account of Dad—" Sidney bit off her words in a sudden panic lest her admission of poverty shock this lovely creature. It had not, however. The dove-gray eyes had softened again with pity.

"Oh, I see. Of course, poets are always poor. I supposed they usually lived in garrets. I nearly flopped when I saw this big house!" This to comfort Sidney. "Well, it's too bad you *can't* go to Grace. I like the riding best. I have my own horse. Gypsy. She's a darling. My roommate is the cutest thing. She's captain of the hockey team and her picture was in the *New York Times*. Her mother made a dreadful fuss about it but it was too late. And she got a letter from a boy in New York who'd seen the picture—the most exciting letter—"

"Oh, *here* you are, Pola," cried a voice behind them and a tall girl elbowed Sidney back into her corner. "Say, Byers will be here at least a half an hour longer. We'll have time for a dope at that store we passed, if we hurry!"

All boredom vanished, the girl Pola sprang to her feet. She paused only long enough to hold out her hand to Sidney. "Don't tell anyone that I don't like Betty Sweets best of all the candy in the world, will you?" she laughed. "And I won't tell anyone that *you* loathe poetry." Then she ran after the tall girl. Sidney felt engulfed in a great and terrible loneliness.

For the next half hour she was only conscious of a fear that Pola and her companion might not get back before Miss Byers discovered their flight. But just as the last eight came out of the study and Miss Byers was lingering for a few words with Mrs.

Milliken, Sidney saw two flying figures join the others at the gate. Her little hope that she might have a chance to talk again with Pola or hear her talk was lost in a surge of relief that she was quite safe.

Mrs. Milliken remained after the others had filed down the street. Sidney, troubled by her fib of the headache, wished with all her soul that she would go and strained her ears for any sound from the floor above that might betray Isolde's activities.

"A lovely thing—to bring those young girls to this spot," Mrs. Milliken was murmuring as she looked over the register which the League kept very carefully. "Here are some well-known names. Jenkins—probably that's the iron family. Scott—I wonder if that's the Scott who's related to the Astors." Sidney watched the gloved finger as it traced its way down the page of scrawled signatures.

"Is there a Pola Somebody there?" she asked, hopefully. Mrs. Milliken's finger ran back up the page.

"No—not that I can find. The girls were very careless—not half of them registered."

Of course Pola wouldn't have registered—she had been too bored.

Her survey finished, Mrs. Milliken put the register in its place and regarded Sidney with contemplative eyes.

"Another time, dear lamb, if you receive, tell

Isolde to—well, fix you up a little. I must speak to the Committee and plan something suitable for you. Perhaps we have been forgetting that our dear little girl is growing out of her rompers. Oh—and another thing, tell Isolde I was *shocked* to smell gasoline on your gifted father's jacket—"

"Trude thought it had moths in it and she soaked it in gasoline," explained Sidney uncomfortably.

"Oh, she *mustn't* do it again. It—it spoiled the atmosphere of everything! I will speak to the dear girls. Give my love to Isolde and tell her to rest. I do not think anyone else will come today for I posted a notice at the clubrooms reserving this date for Grace School."

With an affectionate leave-taking of her "lamb" Mrs. Milliken rustled off. Sidney slowly shut the door. Out there, beyond the hedge, went Pola and the other laughing girls of Grace Hall, out into a world of fun and adventure. And *inside* the door—

Pola had dared race off to the corner drug store; Sidney felt certain Pola would dare *anything*. And *she* had not even had spunk enough to speak up and tell interfering Mrs. Milliken that Trude and the rest of them would soak everything in gasoline, if they wanted to! Most certainly they were not going to let *moths* eat them all up alive!

Oh—oh, it was hateful! And Isolde had said they could not escape it; well, she'd *find* a way!

* * * * *

From abovestairs the three older sisters had witnessed the invasion of their home by the Grace Hall girls.

"It's perfectly disgusting!" had been Vick's comment.

Trude was all sympathy for Sidney. "You were cruel, Issy, making Sid receive that mob."

Isolde reluctantly turned her attention from the faded silks in her lap.

"Sidney might as well realize with what *we* have to put up. Then perhaps she will not be so discontented with her own easy lot—"

From where she squatted on the floor, a huge mending basket balanced on her knees, Trude regarded Isolde with troubled eyes. Her forehead puckered with little criss-cross wrinkles. Of the three older girls Trude had the least claim to beauty; from constant exposure her skin had acquired a ruddiness like a boy's which made her blue eyes paler by contrast; her hair had been cut after an attack of scarlet fever and had grown in so slowly that she wore it shingle-bobbed which added to the suggestion of boyishness about her; there was an ungirlish sturdiness and squareness to her build—one instinctively looked to her shoulders to carry burdens. Yet withal there was about her a lovableness infinitely more winning than Vick's Grecian beauty or Isolde's interesting personality—a lovableness and a loyalty that urged her on now to champion poor Sidney and

yet made it the harder for her to express to the others what she felt deep in her heart.

"Stop a minute and think, Issy. Didn't *we* used to feel discontented lots of times and fuss about things between ourselves? We knew—though we didn't exactly ever *say* it—that we *had* to be different, on account of Dad. We couldn't ever bother him, for fear we'd spoil his work. Of course it was all worth while and doesn't make much difference—now, but, Issy, *Sid* doesn't have to put up with what we did —" Trude stopped suddenly. It seemed dreadful to say: "Dad isn't writing any poems now." She felt the pang of loss in her tender heart that always came when she thought of her father, with his bursts of impatience and his twitching nose and his long hours in the study with the door closed, and then his great indulgence and boyish demonstrativeness when some work that had been tormenting was completed and off or when some unexpected acceptance came with an accompanying check. She blinked back some tears. "You know I wouldn't talk like this to anyone outside of us, but, just among us—I wish we could let Sidney do the things we didn't do when we were her age."

"Trude, I have never heard you talk so foolishly. I'm sure our lot isn't so tragic that Sid can't share it. She has nice friends and goes to Miss Downs and hasn't a responsibility in the world—"

"Sometimes we get tired of the brand of our

best friends and want a change—even yearn for responsibility!"

"I'd say we'd spoiled her enough—she doesn't need any more."

"Isolde, you simply don't want to understand me! Goodness knows I preach contentment the loudest—but— Are we going to live like this all our lives? Look at us, huddled up here, now, because the Saturdays belong to the League. Issy, you and I can go on because we got broken in to it years ago. Vick won't, of course—" (flashing a smile at the disinterested Victoria) "but little Sid— She's fifteen now. She has two more years at Miss Downs'. She may want college—or—or something—different——"

Isolde lifted her shoulders with an impatient shrug. Isolde's thin shoulders were very expressive and had a way of communicating her thoughts more effectively than mere words. They silenced Trude, now.

"Do you think it's a kindness to encourage Sid to want things that we simply can't afford to give her? You ought to know that we can't live a bit differently—you keep our accounts."

Trude groaned. In any argument they always came back to that; their poverty was like the old wall outside that closed them around. If poor little Sid dreamed dreams it would be as it had been with her. Isolde was quite right—it might be no kindness

to the child to let her want things—like college. Yet, though silenced, Trude was not satisfied; there were surely things one could want that could surmount even the ugly wall of poverty.

Vick broke into the pause.

"While we're considering Sid, what are we going to do with her this summer? If she's going to have fits like she had this morning it'll be pleasant having her round with nothing to do. Of course if Godmother Jocelyn makes good on her promise to take me to Banff *I* won't have to worry but—"

"Trude, have you written to Huldah asking her if she can come for July and August? Prof. Deering wrote last week suggesting that I spend the summer with them in their cottage on Lake Michigan. I can more than pay my board by helping Professor Deering with his book and that will relieve Mrs. Deering so that she can play with the children. It will be a change for me—"

"Some change, I'd say," laughed Vicky. "A crabby professor and an overworked wife and two crying babies—"

"Professor Deering *isn't* crabbed at all, Vick; he's a dear and the babies are adorable and Mrs. Deering wrote that the bungalow is right on the water and that she's going to reduce the housework to almost nothing."

"It would be nice, Isolde. Why hadn't you told us of the plan? I had better postpone going to

New York. Aunt Edith White will invite me some other time."

"You mustn't do anything of the sort," remonstrated Isolde quickly. "If you do I'll write to Mrs. Deering and tell her I cannot come. You didn't go to New York at Easter when Aunt Edith White invited you and she may think you don't like to go."

"It seems terribly selfish for us to go away and leave Sid with Huldah in this lonely old house."

"She adores Huldah and she has her chums—"

"And she'll have the Egg to spend—" from Vick.

"But there's such a sameness. And the League brings so many more people—"

"Trude, you're positively silly about Sid. When we were fifteen—"

"Just the same, I don't want to be the one to tell her the three of us are going away to have a good time and leave her here with Huldah all summer—"

"I'll tell her," declared Isolde, firmly. "And I'll try to make her understand she is very well off. Sidney really owes more to the League than the rest of us do for we *could* take care of ourselves. I think we ought to make her appreciate that fact. Vick, look out, quick! Did I hear Mrs. Milliken saying goodby?"

"Yes, there she goes!" cried Vick, now boldly at the window. "What luck to be free so early. Let's see how much is left of poor old Sid."

But Vick, opening the door, saw a very straight, pigtailed figure walk resolutely down the long hall toward the attic stairs. Her quick "Well, kid, how did it go?" fell upon deaf ears, nor did Sidney so much as glance in her direction.

CHAPTER IV

SIDNEY DIGS FOR COUSINS

THE Romley house stood two stories and a half high, heavy-beamed, thick-walled, of square spacious rooms with deep-set windows and cavernous fireplaces under low marble mantels. Joseph Romley had chosen it because he said it was so big a man could think in it; he liked the seclusion, too, that the surrounding wall promised. If his wife faltered before the care it presented she had given no sign but had bravely spread their limited possessions through some of the rooms and had sensibly closed off others.

There had never been a time since the Romleys took possession when the house had not needed painting and shingling, when the guarding wall was not crumbling and the gate swinging on one hinge, when the furnace was not needing cleaning and the plumbing overhauling. But the wind sang cheerily down the great chimneys and the sun poured in through the windows and the ancient elms housed hosts of birds and the hollyhocks bloomed early and late against the wall so that Joseph Romley knew only the beauty of the place and was content and his family, perforce, was content because he was.

There had never been enough of the fine old furniture Mrs. Romley had collected in her bridehood

to furnish a separate room for each one of the girls. Isolde and Trude had always shared a sunny room over the study. In a back room Victoria and Sidney still used the narrow beds of nursery days. Only lately Victoria had painted them gray with a trim of pink rose buds but the effect had suffered so sharply from Sidney's "truck" that Sidney had been coerced into taking her precious belongings to the attic where she established a kingdom of her own.

It was a beautiful attic. Its rafters, shiny and brown, were so low that Sidney, by standing very straight, could touch them with the top of her head. It had mysterious crannies and shadowy corners and deep dusty holes. Sidney had walled off one end by piling one trunk upon another and pushing an old wardrobe next to them. There she had her possessions, a flat-topped desk with long wobbly legs which she reached by a box balanced on an old stool, the skeleton of a sofa on which sat five dusty and neglected dolls, a scrap of carpeting, amazing as to red roses but sadly frayed about its edges, one boastful rocker in complete possession of arms and legs, which Trude had smuggled up to her, and a conglomeration of her favorite books scattered everywhere, for in the seclusion of the attic she could pore over them without risk of some Lady Leaguer discovering her love of them.

To this sanctuary Sidney retreated now from Vick and the Leaguers and her luckless lot. Swing-

ing open the door of the wardrobe so as to shut off any unannounced approach to her den, she tiptoed to a corner, knelt down and cautiously lifted a board from the floor, thereby revealing a space two feet square between the beams.

From among the treasures concealed there she drew out an old ledger on the first page of which was printed in large type: "Dorothea, friend and confidante of Sidney Romley." Jerking herself closer to the window she opened the book across her knees and began to write in it with the stub of a pencil she extracted from the pocket of her middy blouse. "Dearest Dorothea:

"Today I stand at a cross-road of life. I am fifteen. It is not my birthday for I had my birthday as you will see if you turn back to page 64 but I am fifteen today in the eyes of the world for I have come into my legal and just rights. I am to have the next Egg. I had to make a scene before I got them to promise I could have it but it was ever thus with rights. I swear solemnly now to you, dear Dorothea, that I shall never cry again in front of Victoria Romley. Never. I hate her when she laughs. I do not hate Isolde even though she does not understand me and that is hard. And I adore Trude as I have told you on many other pages. However, I am to have the Egg.

"But that is not all that happened this morning. I have talked to the most beautiful girl I ever saw.

Her name is Pola and she goes to Grace Hall, which is a boarding school for very rich girls who have horses. Her father makes candy in a big factory and it is sold all over the world. When I get the Egg I shall buy a great deal of Betty Sweets. That is it. Pola has traveled so much that it bores her to think of it. When she talked she lifted a curtain and let me peep into a wonderful world. I think she liked me. She's going to put me in a theme only she is going to make me like Isolde who just to be mean made me receive the Leaguers this morning and went upstairs and did things as though it was not Saturday at all. But for that I must love her just as if she had not done it to be mean for I would not have met Pola. Pola—is that not the most romantic name you ever heard?—feels sorry for me because my father was a poet and she knew right off how I hate having the Leaguers own us and the house. She was wonderful. I shall never see anyone like her again. My life is doomed to be sad and lonely.

"But though I never see Pola again I shall try to live to be like her. Inside of me, of course. It would be no use to try to be like her outside on account of my horrid hair. Pola's hair is curly and short and she wears it caught with a 'bonny bright ribbon.' My eyes are plain blue and hers are a mysterious gray like an evening sky. Her skin is like creamy satin touched with rose petals and I think it is natural for it is not a bit like Josie Walker's who uses

rouge for Nancy caught her putting it on one day at school in the toilet. Pola is as brave as she is beautiful. She dares anything. She would despise me if she knew that I just let my fate close over my head and do nothing.

" But now that I am fifteen before the world I must take my life in my hands. As adventure will never come to this house on account of the League I must go forth to meet adventure. I will not let the others know what I am planning for, as I said heretofore, Isolde does not understand me and Victoria would only laugh. And as I said heretofore, I hate her when she laughs. But, Victoria Romley, remember the words of the prophet: ' He who laughs last laughs loudest.'

" In case I pass to the Great Beyond and strange eyes read these confidences, let me add that I only hate Vicky when she laughs. At all other times I love her dearly. She is so beautiful that sometimes when I look at her I feel all queer and gaspy inside. Pola is not quite as beautiful as Vic but Pola is a girl like me.

" Dear Dorothea, friend of my inner spirit, as I close this page who knows what the future holds for me? I shall probably be very busy with my plans and may neglect you, my comforter, but as I go forth on my quest I shall often think of you, waiting, faithful, in my secret cranny. And I shall think of Isolde and Trude for I gleaned from some-

thing Isolde said to me this morning when she was mad that she and Trude long to escape from the League the way I do. But they think they have to stay here the rest of their lives. Mayhap I can bring escape to them. Vick will marry of course, but Isolde's beaux look too poor to get married and they are mostly poets as I have told you. And Trude has only her one Lost Love. (Page 92.) Dear Dorothea, farewell. 'Mid pleasures and palaces though I may roam, my heart will come to thee in thy deep and secret chamber.' "

Sidney liked the last line so well that she paused to read it over, aloud.

She closed the book simply because her thoughts were racing ahead so fast that to write them became a torture. She restored "Dorothea" rather carelessly to her "deep and secret chamber." Having secured the loose planking she rose and turned her agile mind to the consideration of a desire that had began shaping when Trude said she could go around the world with the Egg. Of course the Egg would not take her that far but if it would only just take her somewhere on a train she'd be satisfied.

Travel in the Romley family had always been limited. One shabby bag had done comfortable duty for them all. Joseph Romley had never wanted to go away; if the girls' mother ever yearned for other horizons she had hidden it behind a smiling contentment. Neither Isolde nor Trude had gone

further than fifty miles from Middletown until the two trustees, after their father's death, had summoned them to New York. Victoria, seemingly born to more fortune than the others, had been whisked away on several trips with Godmother Jocelyn, traveling luxuriously in a stateroom with a maid but she had returned from even the most prolonged of these so silent and dispirited that Sidney suspected traveling with Godmother Jocelyn, fat and fussy, was not the unalloyed pleasure Vick would have them believe.

To how much Sidney longed to vision the world that lay beyond the level horizons of Middletown an old map of the United States and Canada, tacked to one of the rafters, attested. Upon this Sidney had marked with various signs that meant much to her and nothing to any one else, the different localities of which she read in books or newspapers. When a Leaguer introduced some devotee from some far-off city Sidney promptly noted the visit on the map. In consequence she had a vicarious acquaintance scattered from coast to coast. It was the only way she had ever expected to "know" the world until Trude had said that about the Egg.

She did not count as "traveling" going once to Cascade Lake, twenty miles to the South, and spending a week there with Nancy. They had not gone on a train; they had driven down with Nancy's father in the automobile. Though in anticipation the visit

had appeared like an adventure, in later retrospection it was stupid. It had been just like being at Nancy's house in Middletown; Nancy's father and mother and Snap, the dog, and Caroline, the colored cook, and much of the furniture were all there. It had rained all week and they had had to play in the house and Nancy had had a cold in her head which had made her cross and horrid-looking. No, that had not been "going" somewhere, the way Trude went to New York and Isolde to Chicago.

Crouched low in the sound rocker Sidney stared at the old map with speculative eyes. One could not, when one was the youngest sister, simply pack the old bag and start off for just anywhere. All the trips she knew anything about had some objective; one went somewhere to see somebody. Trude went to see Aunt Edith White, Isolde the Deerings. Vick always went somewhere with Godmother Jocelyn. Plainly her first step was to find someone who lived somewhere where she could want to go.

It was a pity, Sidney lamented voicelessly, that her father had shunned all their relatives the way he had the autograph seekers. Nancy had a great many; she was always going to reunions at some aunt's or cousin's or her mother was having a big "family" dinner. It would help her now to have a few cousins herself. They surely must have some somewhere. Everyone did. That her father had

snubbed them would not make them any the less related.

She suddenly remembered a book she had found once in a box consigned to the attic in that first settling. The book for a while had fascinated her and Nancy, then they had thrown it aside for something more novel, little dreaming that it was destined to hold an important part in the shaping of Sidney's fortunes—and misfortunes. It was a very slender little volume with an embellished binding, long since yellow with dust.

Finding it now Sidney drew the sleeve of her blouse across its cover and opened it. Its first page was given over to a curious tree from the sprawling branches of which hung round things much like grapefruits, each ring encircling one or two names. From each fruit dangled more fruit until the tree was quite overladen. A line at the bottom explained that the curious growth was the Tree of the New England Ellis Family.

At that first inspection Sidney had felt no particular sense of belonging herself to the suspended grapefruits; the only thought that had held her was how many, many years it had taken all those people to live and what a little minute to read their names. But finding an "Ann Ellis" in a corner of the tree had brought them suddenly close to her. "Ann Ellis Green"—why, that was her mother's name. she and Nancy figured out at once that these were

her mother's ancestors—*her* ancestors. Nancy had supplied the word. Nancy had been deeply impressed by the Tree and the Coat-of-Arms which had come down to these Ellises from a Welsh baron of feudal times. She had urged Sidney to use it on her school papers.

But neither the Coat-of-Arms nor the Tree held any especial value to Sidney, brought up as she had been in a state of family isolation, until this moment.

Now the little book offered the reasonable possibility that each ancestor recorded therein had had children, just as that Ann Ellis in the round enclosure had had her mother and her mother in turn had had Isolde and Trude and Vick and herself. These children would be cousins—and cousins were what she needed!

She remembered certain notations that had been made in a fine script on back pages of the book. In search of cousins she now scanned these carefully, with a shivery feeling of prowling over dead bones—the writing was so queer and faded, the paper crackled and smelled so old.

"Charles Ellis, son of James by Mary Martin, second wife. Served in the 102nd Regiment at Gettysburg. Awarded the Congressional Medal for exceptional bravery under fire."

"Priscilla Ellis gave her life in the service of nursing through the epidemic of small-pox that swept Boston in the year of 18—" Sidney read this twice

with a thrill. That was adventure for you. Small-pox. She wondered if Priscilla had been beautiful like Victoria and whether she had left a sweetheart to mourn her tragic death to the end of his days. She liked to think Priscilla had had such.

That one Abner Ellis had been a Selectman for ten years did not interest her—she passed him for the next entry.

"Ann Ellis married Jonathan Green, June 10, 1874. To this happy union has been born one precious daughter, our little Ann." Why, this "little Ann" was her own mother, of course. And the Jonathan Green who was her father had written in the book the little notes about all the Ellises so that when the "Little Ann" grew up she would know all about them and be proud—Priscilla who had died of small-pox and the ancestor with the Congressional Medal. Sidney suddenly thought it strange that her mother had cared so little for the family tree that she had left it, dusty and forgotten, in the attic. Probably that was because her mother had been too busy being a poet's wife to bother about dead and gone Ellises.

She felt a little rush of tender remorse toward Jonathan Green—she wished he had not died when her mother was a little girl. He was her own grandfather. And *he* had had a tree behind *him*—there had doubtless been as many Greens as Ellises. She wished she knew what *they* had been like. And

almost in answer to the thought her eyes fell upon an entry on another page, made in Jonathan Green's fine hand.

"On this day, October 6, 1869, my brother, Ezekiel Green, sailed from Provincetown for far shores on his good ship the *Betsy King* which same has come into his possession as a reward for years of thrift and perseverance. God's blessing go with him—"

There were more entries concerning the brother, Ezekiel. He and his good ship the *Betsy King* were reported as returning safely from the Azores, and again they had rounded Cape Horn, again had ventured to East Indian waters.

"Oh-h!" cried Sidney aloud for at the top of another page she read that the *Betsy King* had foundered off the Cape in the storm of '72—with all lives. "May the soul of my beloved brother, Ezekiel Green, rest in peace with his Maker."

Sidney forgot the Burton-Ellis tree in her breathless interest in the fate of Ezekiel Green who had "foundered" and then rested in peace. It was like a story of marvellous adventure. Her grandfather had evidently thought a great deal of this brother who had sailed the oceans wide. He had added, beneath the entry of the foundering of the *Betsy King:* "Our loving prayers go out in behalf of our beloved Ezekiel's son and daughter, Asabel and Achsa. May they walk in the path their respected

father trod before them!" "That's funny," reflected Sidney, "How *can* they when he sailed the wide seas!"

Sidney's brain actually crackled with lightning calculations. This Asabel and Achsa must be old but they might be still living—and at Provincetown, from whence the *Betsy King* had sailed. Perhaps Asabel had a boat, too. Provincetown—she looked at the map. Why, Provincetown was at the very tip end of that crooked finger of land which always seemed to be beckoning to ships to come to Massachusetts. She knew all about it—she and Nancy had read a delightful book in which a little girl had lived with two guardians who were old sea captains—like Ezekiel Green. And she, Sidney Romley, had never known that she had relatives, real flesh-and-blood relatives, lots of them, no doubt, who lived right on Cape Cod! She wished that Nancy were with her that she might tell her at once. She figured off the generations on her fingers. Ezekiel Green was her mother's uncle, her great uncle. This son and daughter, Asabel and Achsa, were her mother's first cousins, *her* second cousins. She felt suddenly proudly rich in kin.

"Cousin Achsa!" she repeated the name slowly, wondering just how she ought to pronounce it. She pictured Cousin Achsa living in a square white cupolaed house of noble dimensions that crowned

a rocky eminence from which a sweeping view of ocean distances might be had.

This picture had no more than shaped itself in her mind than the resolution formed to communicate at once with Asabel and Achsa. Not a day must be lost. When one had girded oneself to set forth in quest of the Gleam one must not dally over any uncertainties.

Sidney climbed on to the box before the high desk and spread the book before her for reference in spelling her relatives' names. Then she took out a sheet of writing paper and dipped an old pen into a bottle of ink.

Her imagination seething, it was not difficult to frame her unusual letter. Indeed, the writing of it fell into quite easy lines.

"Dear Cousin Achsa:

"You will be very much surprised to get a letter from your second cousin, Sidney Ellis Romley. But I have heard my mother speak of you often. (Let it be said in justice to Sidney that she hesitated over this outrageous fib, then decided it was justified by the necessity for tact. However, some quick calculation caused her to amend her statement.) At least my older sisters have told me that she spoke often of you. You see she died when I was a baby. My father is dead, too. I live with my sisters in Middletown. I am the youngest though I am fifteen.

"My sisters have travelled extensively but I have

never gone anywhere. But this summer I am going to have the Egg which is a sum of money that comes to us each year. (Here Sidney had paused to consider whether she ought to confess that her father had been a poet. She decided she need not.) I can spend the Egg any way I want to. I think I will go somewhere on a train. I came across a family tree of the New England Ellises which told all about the Greens, too, and Ezekiel Green who is your father as you know and his good ship the *Betsy King* which I think was thrilling and how his soul is with his Maker and all about you and Cousin Asabel and it was so interesting, I mean the Greens, not the Ellises, that I have decided to visit you if it is convenient. I will not be any trouble. I wish you would write and tell me if I can come. I shall await your letter with trembling expectancy.

"Your most affectionate and new-found Cousin,

"Sidney Ellis Romley."

Sidney hurried the letter into an envelope, sealed it and addressed it. For a dreadful moment she wondered if she ought to know a street number in Provincetown. This Achsa might have married and have another name. Then she remembered that Isolde always put their own address in one corner of her envelopes. She printed it on hers in square letters. "There, it'll come back to me if it doesn't find Cousin Achsa! But, oh, I hope it does."

"*Sid-ney!* Luncheon. I've called you three times."

Vick's voice, sharply rebuking, broke across Sidney's occupation. She jumped hurriedly from her perch, tucking the letter into the pocket of her blouse. Her lips pressed together in a straight thin line of red. Life must, of course, appear to go on as usual—school and the same stupid things she did every day, Nancy, who was so distressingly short of the standard Pola had that day forever fixed. No one, her sisters least, must suspect that Adventure loomed so close. She would guard her plans carefully in her "inscrutable breast."

CHAPTER V

"THE SUMMER WILL TELL WHO LAUGHS LAST!"

To use Sidney's own thought, "things happened" with amazing swiftness. If a fairy godmother had been invited in at her christening her plans could not have prospered more.

First came Mrs. Milliken's unpleasant announcement that the Summer Convention of the League was to be held in Middletown during July which meant that every day for two weeks would see the old house invaded by the curious and the reverent. Mrs. Milliken, in Sidney's hearing, had gently hinted that it would be very nice if the girls could go away somewhere for July—at least all of them except dear Isolde.

Then Sidney heard for the first time of Isolde's invitation to the Deerings. Isolde had thrown it in self-defense at Mrs. Milliken. "I do not expect to be here, Mrs. Milliken. I am going to Professor Deering's for July and August to help him with his new book." Sidney turned away to hide a sudden smile, not, however, before she caught Trude's eyes anxiously upon her.

Then the Egg—seventy whole dollars—came on the same day that Godmother Jocelyn informed Vick by telegram that if she could be ready by the first

of July she could go with her to California by way of the Canadian Rockies. "Be ready! Well, I should just say I *could*!" Vick's eyes had shone like stars against a velvet black sky and Sidney had again intercepted that anxious glance from Trude.

Isolde considered this an auspicious moment, with all the excitement over Vick, to break to Sidney their plans for the summer—plans hurried to a head by the League's announcement.

"And Trude's going to Long Island with the Whites, dear, but you won't be lonely with Huldah. You can have Nancy here and probably she will invite you down to Cascade."

"Oh, there's a letter from Huldah on the table in the hall! I meant to bring it in and forgot," cried Vick.

"Get it, dear," asked Isolde, gently, of Sidney. Action would help Sidney control her disappointment—if the child *was* disappointed. Perhaps Trude was over-apprehensive.

Trude hastily scanned the few lines of the letter Sidney put into her hands. "Oh, *dear,*" she exclaimed "Huldah can't come."

Could any fairy godmother, indeed, have shaped circumstances with more kindly hand?

"She says she can't leave her niece. Her niece's just had a baby. And her rheumatism is bad."

"I call that rank disloyalty," cried Isolde with spirit. After all we've stood from Huldah!"

"What'll we do? Can't we make her come? Doesn't she owe us more consideration than her niece?"

Trude put the letter down. "Huldah isn't disloyal. You know that, Isolde. And she doesn't owe us anything. Don't forget, Vick, that she worked for us for years for almost nothing when she could have gone anywhere else and received good pay. This house *is* damp and big and Huldah is old. No, we can't beg her to come—over this. It was probably hard for her to refuse. I'll stay home with Sid. We'll have lots more fun here together than I'd have with Aunt Edith White on Long Island—in spite of the League. Will we not, Sid?"

There was so much more sincerity in Trude's honest blue eyes than any suggestion of self-sacrifice that Sidney ran around to her and hugged her. She longed to tell Trude and the others of her own budding plans—only she had not received as yet an answer from Cousin Achsa. So all she could say was: "We just won't mind the League!"

And then that very afternoon the postman, meeting her outside the wall, had handed her an envelope addressed to "Miss Sidney Ellis Romley" and postmarked *Provincetown!*

Sidney ran with it straight to her attic retreat. Her heart within her breast hurt with its high hopes. There was a Cousin Achsa—her own letter had reached her and had been answered! She studied

the unfamiliar writing on the envelope—it was a big sweeping script. The envelope felt fine and soft in her fingers and smelled faintly of a fragrance that was not of flowers and yet distinctly pleasant. Oh, this Cousin Achsa must be wealthy, like Pola!

She broke the envelope and spread out the double sheet it contained. At its top she read, "My dear little Cousin." She paused long enough to wonder why Cousin Achsa thought that she was little.

"My dear little Cousin:

"Of course you may come to visit us. We shall enjoy learning to love a young cousin who must be delightful if we can judge from her letter. We blame ourselves and the miles that have separated us for not knowing anything of 'Sidney Ellis Romley' until yesterday, though we knew your mother in days long past. Will you write and tell us when we may expect you? Can a girl of fifteen find her way to this outlying bit of country? If you decide you cannot perhaps we can arrange for you to come with someone. We await your word with affectionate anticipation.

"Your already loving cousin,

"Achsa."

Sidney blinked hard simply to be certain that the words actually lay before her eyes. Then she read it again and again—aloud. Oh, it was too wonderful to believe. It was a *beautiful* letter—Cousin Achsa must surely live in the square white house on the

eminence she had pictured. She had written "we" so perhaps Cousin Asabel still lived or maybe there were young cousins. Anyway, they wanted her. She hugged the letter to her and rushed off to find the girls. Oh, Huldah could stay with her niece if she wanted to! And Trude could go to Long Island! The Leaguers could come and camp in the house! Guided by the murmur of voices Sidney broke headlong into an informal conference of the older sisters. Her drama-loving soul could not have built a more perfect stage, nor asked a more thrilling moment of denouement. Isolde had just declared generously, that she could not enjoy a day of her stay with the Deerings if Trude had to give up the Long Island plans.

"It isn't as though we girls received invitations every day," she explained tearfully. "And it'll be stupid for you here, Trude, with just Sidney. Perhaps it's my duty to stay home and help Mrs. Milliken."

"Your sacrifice is quite unnecessary!" Sid answered in such a queer voice that the three older girls stared at her in alarm. In truth her flushed face and wild eyes gave strength to the sudden conviction that she had gone mad! She fairly leaped at Isolde and flung her letter into Isolde's lap. "I guess 'just Sid' is capable of making her own plans!"

Sidney had a moment's terror that she was "beginning" wrong but Isolde's remark which she

had overheard had upset all her preplanned diplomacy. Now she stood back, anxiously, and watched Isolde read the letter.

As Isolde read it aloud she punctuated it with excited exclamations.

"My dear little Cousin"—Why, Sid, how did you happen to write to her? How did you know she wasn't dead? Why—"Of course you may come and visit us!" Sid, what *have* you been doing? Why—" and so, to the end.

Sidney drew a long breath and braced herself. Her explanation tumbled out with such incoherence that the girls kept interrupting her to ask her to repeat something. Well, they had told her she could use the Egg any way she wanted to and she wanted to go somewhere a long way off—on a train. One always had to visit someone or with somebody and she'd remembered these cousins—

"Why, how *could* you, Sid? I don't think you've ever heard us speak of them. I'm sure I'd almost forgotten them—"

"Well, I *did*. Blood's thicker than water," witheringly, "and maybe you can just remember relatives without ever hearing anything about them. She's nice, I know, because her father was persevering and thrifty—"

A sudden laugh from Vick brought Sidney to an abrupt stop. But Isolde, rebuking Vick with a

lift of her right shoulder, turned her attention again to the letter.

"It's a very nice letter—a—a cultured letter, don't you think so, Trude? Somehow I have always had the idea that these relations in the East—the Greens—were very poor and—well, uneducated. But this letter doesn't look like it. And they actually seem to *want* Sidney to come!"

"It's a long way—" Trude put in.

"But I want to *go* a long way. I don't just want to go to some place right near home—like Cascade. There's money enough—Nancy and I asked at the railroad station. And the man there gave me a time-table with all sorts of interesting pictures on it. It's the very most interesting place I ever heard of—it's an education. I want to go. I've—I've never been anywhere."

Isolde was trying not to look as though this unexpected development of things was pleasing but she simply could not suppress the thought that in permitting Sid to go to these cousins lay their one chance of happy escape for their summer. After all—these Cape Cod relatives *were* first cousins of their mother's, her very own people. She wished she could remember what her mother had told of them from time to time but it could not have been anything to their discredit or she would have remembered. And the letter, in its woody fragrance, the bold sweep of the handwriting, the expensive texture of the paper,

bespoke culture, even wealth. However, with a lingering sense of duty, she reminded Sidney that this Cousin Achsa must be very old.

As if that mattered! Sidney flung out an impatient hand. It was like Isolde to sit rock-fashion and trump up reasons why she'd better not go. But Vick came unexpectedly to her aid.

"If she's old—all the better. She'll make Sid behave herself. I think this is the luckiest thing that could have happened. Now we can all go away. Sid wanted adventure—she'll have it with Cousin—what's her name?"

Though she writhed under the tone in Vick's voice Sidney bit her lips over the retort that sprang to them. Anyway, she *would* have her adventure. She wanted to go on the train all alone; the ticket-office man had said it would be quite safe and had told her that he'd write something on a card that she could show to each conductor. She'd like not to have even to do *that,* for that seemed a little babyish.

Trude had found a reassuring thought. "I'll be near enough, anyway, so that if Sid gets homesick or finds that things aren't just what she'd like them to be she can telegraph to me and come home. You will, won't you, kid?"

Sid promised hastily. Then for the next half hour everything whirled about her; she could not

believe what her ears heard, what her eyes beheld. The girls were actually planning for her—clothes, trunks, tickets, trains. Trude was figuring and making notes on the back of Cousin Achsa's letter. It was, "Sid will need this—Sid had better do that—it will be nice for Sid to see this—I think by way of Boston is the better route—you'd better write to Cousin Achsa, Trude—No, let Sid write herself—had we ought to consult the Trustees? Why, we're old enough to decide this for ourselves—she'd better go just before Vick and then we can pack away our intimate things and turn the house over to the League."

"Didn't Evangeline come from somewhere up that way? Oh, no. Well, I always think of Cape Cod and Nova Scotia as being off there on the map together. Anyway, write and tell us, kid, when you find the Chalice or Grail or whatever it is! If you discover any untrodden fields of romance—wire us and we'll send one of Issy's poets down—"

Now, in her exalted spirit Sid could meet Vick's raillery with a level glance. Let Vick laugh! Cape Cod wasn't off "somewhere" in a corner of the map. It was as intriguing as the Canadian Rockies. And she had a lot shut away in her heart about which Vick and the others knew nothing. All that about the good ship *Betsy King*. *Betsy King* had foundered as a good ship should, but there was a

big chance that Cousin Asabel, Ezekiel's son, might have a boat. Then she had a glimpse into a beautiful world that Pola had given her; she would see Pola's world from the train window. It was simply all too breath-taking to think of. Oh, the summer would tell who would laugh last!

CHAPTER VI

SUNSET LANE

When Tillie Higgins saw Joe the baker's cart pass her house she ran to her gate.

"He must be going to Eph Calkins or to Achsy Green's. Now I wonder—" Joe rarely penetrated Sunset Lane with his goods; Tillie Higgins and old Mrs. Calkins did their own baking and Achsa Green's pies were legend.

Old Mrs. Calkins, too, had seen the baker's rickety cart approaching through the deep sand. At once she "happened" to be out tying up her yellow rambler.

"Got a letter for Achsy Green," the baker called to her, leaning out of his cart.

"You don't say! Not bad news, I hope?"

"Dunno. It's a letter. Thought I'd bring it to her. Gettap, General. Pretty nice weather we're havin'. Dry, though."

"Tell Achsy I'll drop over soon's my bakin's done."

Tillie Higgins' shadow fell across the yellow roses. Tillie was a little breathless; she had hurried over to catch what the baker was saying.

"A letter? For Achsy Green? You don't say. Not bad news I hope," She echoed.

"Joe dunno. Cal'late that's why he came all this way with it. He'll find out what's in that letter if he can. Then the hul town'll know. I told him to tell Achsy I'd drop over soon's my pies are out of the oven. Better set down a spell and go along with me."

But Tillie Higgins, with regret in her voice, explained that she had bread in her own oven. "If it's news send Martie over with it. Hope it's nothing bothersome. Achsy Green has 'nough as 'tis."

This Sunset Lane was the farthest byway of the northernmost habitation of Cape Cod. Only a ridge of sandy dunes at its back-door kept it from tumbling into the blue Atlantic. Provincetown folk called it "up p'int way" and "t'other end." The more fanciful name had been given to it by a young Portuguese who had essayed to convert that corner of Provincetown into a summer colony. He had only succeeded, after long effort, in selling the Carpenter house nearest Commercial Street, then had abandoned his enterprise to open a combination garage and one-arm lunch room on Commercial Street.

Sunset Lane led nowhere, unless one counted the dunes; it was only wide enough for a cart to pass between the hedging rows of crowding wild flowers and the guardian willows; it was deep in sand. The rising tide of commercialism that was destroying the eighteenth-century dignity of the little town turned before it reached it. Few went there unless on

definite purpose bound, excepting the artists who came singly and in groups to paint an old gray gable against an overtowering hill of sand or a scrap of blue sky between crumbling chimney pots and peaked roofs or old Mrs. Calkins' hollyhocks that flanked the narrow byway like gaudy soldiers. Some sketched Jeremiah Higgins' octagonal house, more of an oddity than a thing of grace yet ornamented with hand-wrought cornices and dignified by a figurehead from the prow of a ship long since split into driftwood; others went on to the end of the lane to catch upon their canvases the grace of Achsa's Green's old gray-shingled cottage with its low roof and white pilastered doorway.

With the changing years Achsa Green had become as quaint as her surroundings. Bent, and small, her face seared to the brown of a withered leaf from the hot suns and biting winds, her hands knotted with labor, her sparse hair twisted into a knob at the exact center of the back of her head, she was not lovely to look upon, yet from her eyes gleamed a spirit that knew no wear of age, that took its knocks upstanding, that suffered when others suffered but that spread a healing philosophy of God's wisdom. For Achsa's acceptance of God's wisdom faltered only when she thought of Lavender.

Lavender was her brother Asabel's only child. His mother had died a week after his birth, his father five months before. Achsa had taken the

babe into her arms and had promised to "do" for him. And she had, with a fierce yearning, a compassion that hurt to her very soul. For Lavender was not like other children; his poor little body was sadly crippled. Achsa had at first refused to believe but that he might "grow straight," then as the years convinced her that this could never be she consecrated herself to the single task of keeping him fed and clothed and happy and "out o' mischief." She clung staunchly to the hope that, if she prayed hard enough by night and believed by day that her boy was "straight," sometime Lavender *would* be straight and all their little world—the Cape—would know.

There was nothing unusual in Dugald Allan of Rahway, N. J., finding Sunset Lane, for he was a fledgling artist and came there like other artists, but certainly a destiny that was kind toward old Achsa had something to do in the skirmish that ensued between Poker, Allan's brindle bull-pup, and Nip and Tuck, Achsa Green's two black cats. Tuck, caught sunning herself in the middle of the lane, had recognized a foe in Poker and had defended her stronghold; Poker, resenting her exclusiveness, had offered battle. Nip, never far from his sister, had promptly thrown himself into the fray. There had resulted a whirl of sand like a miniature cyclone from which young Allan rescued Poker just in time to save his brindle hide. Nip, unvanquished, had retreated to

the very doorway that Allan had come to paint; Tuck fled to the shelter of a bed of tall sweet william.

"Dear! Dear!" cried Achsa Green in the open doorway. "Oh, my cats—"

"Nobody hurt. I'm sorry," laughed young Allan. "I mean—Poker's sorry. I don't understand his rudeness. He never fights anyone smaller than himself. I've brought him up to a high sporting code. He must have misunderstood your cat's attitude. He apologizes, humbly."

Assured that her pets were unharmed the little old woman in the doorway had laughed gleefully. "Tuck's sort o' suspicious o' strange folks, but I cal'late she didn't take a good look at *you!* She must a looked at your dog first!"

"I thank you for the compliment. You see, we came quite peaceably to paint your doorway. You're Miss Green, aren't you? I'm sure that's the door they told me about. And if your defiant animal will stand like that long enough for me to sketch it—I'd consider myself in luck—"

"I cal'late he will—if your dog's 'round. Nip ain't 'fraid of nothin' 'slong as his own door's at his back. Don't know as anyone's wanted to draw his picture before. He'll be all set up for sure!"

Whipping out his pad Dugald Allan, with rapid strokes, had sketched the door and the cat—and Achsa Green. Later the picture he painted from the

sketch hung in a Paris exhibition. When he showed the drawing to Achsa Green she had beamed with pleasure. "Why, that's as like Nip as though it war a twin." Nip, scenting the friendly atmosphere, had relaxed, stretched, yawned, waved a plumy tail toward poor Poker, watching fearfully from behind his master, and had stalked, disdainful, over to the sweet william to reassure the more timid Tuck.

Of course Achsa Green had wanted to show the "picture" to Lavender and Dugald Allan, eager to see the inside of the old house, had followed her into the low-ceilinged kitchen. And that had been ten years ago and each succeeding spring since had brought Dugald Allan back to Sunset Lane.

Achsa Green knew him only as "a nice appearin' boy—not so much on looks," with a kindly manner toward Lavender and an appreciation of the merits of Nip and Tuck. And inasmuch as Nip and Tuck made friendly advances to Poker and Lavender would do things for Dugald Allan that he would not do for anyone else, she finally consented to "let" her gable room to the young stranger and to board him as well. In settling the matter of board young Allan had had to deal with a pride as hard as the granite of the breakwall he could glimpse from the one window of his room; it had been only after he convinced Aunt Achsa that he could never feel like "one of the folks" until he contributed something to the upkeep of the family, that he had persuaded her

to accept the sum of money which he considered barely repaid her trouble but which Aunt Achsa deemed a fortune.

Wisely young Allan paid the "board money" at the bank. He had come to know Aunt Achsa's failings, how sometimes she stowed her scant earnings away and forgot its hiding place; how at other times she gave them to someone needier than herself. Many a one of her generation had told him that she was without "sense" where business was concerned. It was everyone's wonder how she'd managed to feed two mouths, not counting the cats, with Lavender not earning so much as his salt. And gradually, as the summers passed, Allan took upon his shoulders other responsibilities; planning safe pastimes for Lavender, marketing, after which the kitchen cupboards groaned with food; persuading Aunt Achsa to let her rugs go and putter in her flowers while the summer lasted.

With the Cape standards of wealth it would not have made any difference to Achsa Green, anyway, or to anyone else, if they had known that the "nice-appearin' boy" in the old flannels was the only son of Roderick Allan, President of the Allan Iron Works of Newark, New Jersey. Not half so much difference as the old flannels made to Dugald's mother. The inclination on the part of their boy to be "queer," for under that head they put all his predilections that differed from their ambitions—dis-

tressed his parents very much. The boy had "everything" and he didn't care a rap about "anything"; they looked upon his spells of dreamy preoccupation as "loafing." His father had an executive office in the iron works waiting for him when he finished college, a job at which any red-blooded young fellow would jump, and Dugald talked of painting. His mother had grieved that he would take no part in the social whirl that made up her existence, that he laughed at the creed of her "set," scouted the class commandments by which she lived. When he expressed the intention of going on a tramp over Cape Cod she had encouraged the whim. She had believed that the discomforts of such an expedition would cure him of his "notions." She had motored to Provincetown two summers before and she thought it a forlorn place; the hotels were impossible, the streets dusty and crowded, everything smelled fishy and one was always elbowing great foreign creatures in dirty oilskins and rubber boots.

Like many a mother she had been too busy living down to her rapidly accruing wealth to know the man her boy had grown to be. All her upbringing notwithstanding he was a simple soul with a sympathetic understanding of his fellow mortals; a quiet humor and a keen perception of beauty that abhorred the false or superficial, a brain that stifled in crowded places. He much preferred knocking elbows with men of homely labor to the crowded and law-break-

ing parties he came to Cape Cod to escape; he found among the fisherfolk, the old gray wharves, the sandy dunes, everlastingly swept with the clean breath of the Atlantic, a peace of mind and an inspiration he had never known elsewhere. The longing in his heart to paint that had been scarcely more than an urge, took definite and splendid shape. Someone else had the executive job in his father's manufacturing plant.

That he grew to know that Aunt Achsa needed him and looked forward to his coming strengthened the bond that brought him back to Sunset Lane each spring. No one had ever needed him before and it was a man-satisfying sensation. And in Aunt Achsa's affection for him there was a depth which he divined but only vaguely understood. In his hardy six feet four the compassionate mother-woman was seeing her poor Lavender, big and strong and "straight." To her Dugald was what Lavender "wasn't"; in her way she put him and Lavender together and made a satisfying whole. Sometimes she wondered if Dugald might not be the answer to her prayers!

It had been to young Allan that Aunt Achsa had carried the letter that the baker brought so unexpectedly to the door. Joe had lingered on the doorstep, but had not been rewarded by any hint of its contents. Achsa could not remember when she had had a letter before. She fingered the envelope apprehensively. Yet it could scarcely be bad news of any sort,

for there was just herself and Lavender and he was only down in the flats. No one would write anything about *him.*

"Read it—my eyes ain't certain with folk's writing," she had begged Dugald Allan, in a shaky voice. Thereupon he had read aloud Sidney's letter.

"I never!" "I swan!" "Why, that's Annie Green's girl—Annie was Jon'than's daughter—I rec'lect her when she wasn't much bigger than a pint of cider." Achsa Green fluttered with excitement like a quivering brown leaf caught in a sudden stir of wind. "And the little thing says she knows all about me. Heard her folks tell. Well, well, I wouldn't 'a said there was a God's soul knew about Achsa Green outside this harbor! The little pretty. And her ma's dead—died when she was a baby, poor little mite. Sidney—that's not a Cape name. Like as not they got it from the other side. Well, Uncle Jon'than allas was diff'runt—he was for books and learnin' and was a peaked sort, as I rec'lect him—He was consid'rable younger than Pa!"

During Achsa's excited soliloquy Dugald Allan had an opportunity to reread the letter. He smiled broadly over the reading. But his smile changed to a quick frown as he observed the signature. For a brief second he pondered over it, then by a shake of his head seemed to dismiss some thought.

"What are you going to tell her?" he asked Achsa Green. "Will you let her come on?"

Achsa Green started. She had not thought of the real business of the letter. "Why, I don't know. It's a poor place for a young girl—"

"Don't talk like that, Aunt Achsa. Haven't I told you this is the only corner of the earth where God's air is sweet—and untainted?"

Achsa Green could only understand what her Mr. Dugald meant by the expression of his eyes. Now, they encouraged her. "I might fix up the downstairs bedroom. It ain't been used except to store things since Lavender was born in there and his ma was taken out in a box, but I don't know but that I could fix it up suit'ble; a young girl ain't so finicky as grownups. If you won't mind havin' a young piece 'round—" uncertainly.

It was *not* exactly to Dugald Allan's liking to have a "young piece" around. He had planned some difficult and steady work for the summer. And he had an unreasonable aversion to fifteen-year-olds, at least the kind like his young cousin and her friends, which was the only kind he really knew. But he was touched by Aunt Achsa's delight in finding "flesh-and-blood" kin; he did not like to dampen her pleasure. He could work somewhere else, in one of the corners of the breakwall or among the dunes. He smilingly assured her that a "young piece" around would add tremendously to his summer.

"I dunno if I can write her a nice enough letter, my hand shakes so, and I ain't much of a head at

spelling. Pa never set anything by books himself and Asabel's and my schoolin' sort o' depended on the elements." Dugald Allan sensed that Achsa did not want this little unknown cousin, miles away, to know of her lack of "schoolin'."

"Bless you, I'll write and I'll write just as though it came from you."

"Don't know as there's a scrap of writin' paper in this house."

"My best is none too good," promised young Allan promptly, delighting in the growing pleasure in the wrinkled face.

But one more doubt assailed Achsa Green. Lavender.

"D'you think I ought to tell first hand—about Lavender?"

Early in his acquaintance with Aunt Achsa and Sunset Lane Dugald had come to know how it hurt Aunt Achsa to speak of Lavender as "being different." At first, with courteous consideration he had avoided the truth—then as the summers passed he himself had grown fond enough of the boy to forget the crooked body.

He hesitated a moment before he answered, then he spoke gently:

"No, Aunt Achsa. That is not necessary. And anyway—it's only the outer shell of him that is different, his soul is fine and straight and manly."

At this Achsa's eyes caressed him; he put so easily into words what she tried so bravely to remember.

And thus it had come about that Dugald Allan wrote on his best stationery (which he kept for his letters to his mother) to Sidney Ellis Romley, as though, per promise, it was Cousin Achsa, herself. He had had to write several letters before one quite suited both him and Achsa. The letter despatched, to his surprise he shared with Aunt Achsa considerable interest in its outcome. It would certainly knock the summer flat, but Aunt Achsa's delighted anticipation was rare.

He helped her to prepare the "spare" room off the parlor and to remove anything that might remind its young occupant of that tragic passing of Lavender's mother "by box." He abetted her safeguarding the various mementoes of the days when the *Betsy King* sailed into the harbor from foreign shores.

"No sense leavin' things 'round waitin' to be knocked off long's they lived through them cats. You can't tell what fifteen's goin' to be!"

"No—" groaned Allan inwardly, "You certainly can not."

In the last hours before Sidney's expected arrival he agreed to meet her. Though that was Lavender's duty he knew, as well as Achsa, that she could not depend upon Lavender. "If he took it into his head

to go down to Rockman's wharf why, he'd go—cousin or no cousin comin'," Aunt Achsa had worried; and then Dugald had come to the rescue, even promising to go so far as to hire Hiram Foss's hack—none of the town taxis would go through the sand of Sunset Lane!

CHAPTER VII

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

"LAND O' GOSHEN, you don't tell me you're cruisin' down to the Cape all by yourself! Now, ain't that exciting! And you never been there before, y'say?"

Sidney nodded, sitting very straight on the seat, her hand closed tightly over her purse which contained all that was left of the Egg after purchasing her tickets. Her face perceptibly brightened. Others had talked to her during the long journey but they had had a way of saying "brave little girl" that had been annoying and that had not helped the lump that persisted in rising in her throat.

This stranger Sidney felt was himself from the Cape. He was big and broad and had bushy white whiskers that encircled a very red face. From his booming voice she knew he must have commanded a ship; perhaps he knew Ezekiel Green and the *Betsy King*. She smiled shyly at him as he slid into the seat beside her. They were leaving Plymouth behind.

"Goin' to Provincetown? Well, now, that's about as far as you *can* go, 'lowin' you ain't goin' to Race P'int Light, by chance. You be careful that no pirates come 'long and ship and stow you in the fo'castle! There's a-plenty of 'em 'round these waters yet."

"Of course I know there aren't really pirates—but what's a—a fo'castle?"

Her new friend roared. "Bless the heart of the little landlubber! Why, the—the fo'castle's the—the fo'castle—for'ard of the fo'mast. And don't you be too sure about the pirates—you ask Jed Starrow if there ain't! Only they don't run up their flag no more—I guess the black sky's *their* flag."

"Have they any treasure buried on the Cape?" Sidney ventured.

The old seaman started to laugh again, then smothered it by a big hand at his whiskers. "Now I won't say they have or they haven't. The Cape ought to be full of it. And these here pirates I speak of bury their treasures somewheres—jest where's the business of Uncle Sam's men to find out." He struck his chest proudly and Sidney caught the gleam of a badge pinned to one of the red straps of his suspenders. He saw that she had glimpsed it; doubtless he had intended she should.

"Special deputy marshal—I'm Cap'n Phin Davies of Wellfleet, retired, you might say—at Uncle Sam's command."

"Oh, I guessed you'd sailed a ship. Do you—did you know the Greens?"

"Greens? There's Greens all over the Cape. But I reckon I know 'most everyone in these parts and if I don't, Elizy does—"

"Ezekiel Green sailed the *Betsy King*—" enlightened Sidney.

"Old Zeke? Why, sure as spatter! Well, well! I might say I was brought up on stories about Zeke Green. My father overhauled the *Betsy King* for Zeke. Zeke's folks any folks of yours?" turning suddenly to Sidney.

Sidney explained that they were—that she was Sidney Romley of Middletown, going now to visit her Cousin Achsa, whom she had never seen and of whom she knew little.

"You don't say. My, my, comin' all this way. So Achsa's livin', is she? Zeke's boy died, near as I can remember. I rec'lect a benefit they had for his widow. She was a Wellfleet girl. Seems to me she died, too. Yes, she did—suddenly, when her baby was born. Can't rec'lect whether the baby lived or not. Don't pay much time to those things, don't have to for Elizy does it well enough for the two of us. Ain't anything on the Cape Elizy misses. Comes to me though that I heard her say something about that kid—sure does. I remember that benefit like it was last night. I'd just come ashore from a long v'yage and was rigged from t'mast to mizzen for a night at Potter's with the boys and Elizy puts me into a b'iled shirt and makes me hitch up the hoss and drive to that benefit. I guess I ought 'er remember it."

He was too deep in his own reminiscences to observe the effect of his words upon Sidney. So Cousin Asabel was dead! And they had had a benefit for his widow. Sidney did not know just what a benefit was but the sound of the word connected it in her brain with the League and the mortgage. She wished Cap'n Phin Davies could remember whether the baby had lived or not.

"If it had lived—I mean that baby—how old would it be, now?"

"Oh—yes—the baby. Let's see. That benefit must a' been all a' sixteen or seventeen year ago. It was the last trip I made on the *Valiant*. Yep, the last. Elizy'd know for sartin sure, though. Ain't many dates she can't remember down to the minit. There's somethin' about that kid of Green's I've heard Elizy tell—" He turned suddenly to Sidney: "You're comin' down to this part of the country to visit what's left of your folks hereabouts and you don't know nothin' 'bout them? Seems to me some one ought 'a shipped with you. Now I wish 'twas Elizy and me you was comin' to visit. I sartin' do. Elizy likes little girls—we've often wished we had a boat's crew of 'em. What's the use I tell her of havin' a house as big as a four-masted schooner and nary a chick or a child in it. I tell you, you ask your auntie or whatever she is to let you come over and stay a spell with us. Wellfleet ain't so far. I'll tell Elizy. You'll come, now, won't you? Anyone can

tell you which is Phin Davies' house—ain't any much finer on the Cape."

"Is it square—and white—and on an eminence?"

"Eh? If it's a hill you mean, you're right. I told Elizy after I'd made my last v'yage she could build anything she had her heart set on but it'd got to be where I could smell the harbor. Got a lookout atop where you can see the boats when they sail round the Point." A faintly wistful note shaded the rugged voice. "You tell folks in Provincetown that you're a friend of Cap'n Phin Davies and I guess you can just about have anything you want in the town. There's a few of us old fellows left!"

As the train carried them further upon the Cape a boyish excitement seized the old man. He declared that, though he'd only been in Boston three or four days, it was as good as "moorin' from a long v'yage." He pointed out to Sidney the places and things of interest they were passing. Through his eyes Sidney saw the beauty of the old, elm-shaped villages, the rich meadow lands, the low-lying salt marshes, the sand-bars gleaming against stretches of blue water. Cap'n Phin Davies seemed to know something, and it was nearly always funny, about every one who lived in the quaint houses set here and there under century old trees. Wellfleet came all too soon.

"Now don't forget, Missy, you're coming to

visit old Phin Davies. I'll tell Elizy. And keep an eye to wind'ard for those pirates!"

"Gosh all fish hooks," he exclaimed to his Elizy a half hour later, as he divested himself of his Sunday coat and vest and sprawled his great hulk in his own easy chair, "don't know as I've ever seen a cuter little girl—and comin' all this way by herself to visit what's left of Zeke Green's folks."

In her way Eliza Davies registered sincere horror. "You don't say! Why, all there *is* is old Achsa and that poor Lavender! Now, you don't say! The little thing—"

With Cap'n Phin's going Sidney was engulfed in a terrifying loneliness. The lump swelled in her throat again. She tried desperately to rally something of that splendid excitement with which she had started on her journey, to thrill again over the assembled belongings in the old satchel, some things Isolde's and some Trude's and some even Vick's. The girls had been very kind and generous with her. But in spite of her valiant efforts her spirits sank lower and lower. She had come so far, she had sat through so many lonely hours that all that had happened back at Middletown seemed now to belong to someone else—some other Sidney Romley. Strong within her mounted an apprehension at what awaited her at her journey's end.

But there was a chance the "baby" *had* lived; Cap'n Davies had said it'd be about sixteen. Sidney

hoped it was a boy—a boy cousin would be such fun. And he'd be more likely to have a boat. In order to keep from thinking that the low dunes of sand and marsh, shrouded in twilight haze, through which they now were passing were very dreary she held stubbornly to her speculations concerning the "baby." She was tired and hungry. The lump was growing very big and hurt. When, as she finally followed her fellow passengers off the train and along a bustling platform she heard a pleasant voice ask: "Is this Sidney Romley?" she gave an involuntary little gasp of relief.

"Oh, are you my cousin?"

Dugald Allan took her bag. "Well, yes, if both of us belonging to Aunt Achsa can make us cousins. Are you tired? It's an endless journey—you think you are never going to get here, don't you? Did you have any fears that you'd just ride off into the ocean? You had a coolish day." As he talked he piloted her through the crowd, a crowd that startled Sidney after those miles of twilight loneliness. "It's always like this toward the week-end," he apologized. "But Sunset Lane is quiet enough. I've old Dobbin here and the one-hoss shay. Hoist this up, will you, Toby?" he addressed a lanky barefooted boy who slouched upon the driver's high seat.

As they creaked and swayed down the sandy road Sidney turned searching eyes again upon her companion.

"I mean—are you the baby that was born? You see, Captain Phin Davies told me—"

"Oh, you mean Lavender. No—I am not Lavender. I just live with Aunt Achsa summers; wouldn't that make me a—sort of half-nephew?"

"But there *is* a cousin?" Sidney drew a quick breath. "You see everything's so strange to me that I have to put it all together, like a picture puzzle. And it will be *nice* having someone young in the picture. Then you're—you're—a sort of boarder?" Her voice rose, hesitatingly.

"I suppose so. Though Aunt Achsa holds me as one of the family and I hope you will, too, when you get that picture put together. What do you think of our Cape?"

"Oh, it's wonderful! Only—" Sidney had to be honest. "I didn't like it so well until Captain Phin Davies made me see what was so nice about it. You see I expected to see a stern and rock-bound coast."

At this Allan laughed. "We'll have to find one for you, won't we? Well, wait until you see the back shore. Toby's taking a short-cut home. I expect he knows Aunt Achsa has the finest dinner you ever tasted waiting for us—we'll be there in two seconds now."

Two seconds—and her journey would be over, her adventure begun. Again that apprehension mounted sweeping before it even her hope of the big house on an eminence. She was scarcely con-

scious of anything they were passing. The dusk had deepened, enveloping them like a heavy veil. She heard her companion say: "This is Sunset Lane." Then, with a great jolt, the ancient equipage stopped. "Here we are—and there's Aunt Achsa watching for us!"

They were so close to the house that Sidney almost could have jumped from the step of the carriage to the threshold. All about her she felt rather than saw crowding flowers. And in the open door silhouetted against a glow of lamplight waited a very small, brown old lady.

Ascha Green fluttered out to meet Sidney and touched the girl with shy hands.

"Well, well, you're here. Don't seem true. Let old Achsa look at you, child. Annie's girl. Come in. Come right in. I 'expect you're tuckered out and hungry, too. Lavender, come and meet your new cousin."

Sidney's glance shot across the room to the boy who huddled back of the stove, regarding her with shy dark eyes. And as quickly it dropped before what she saw. Ascha Green, watching, sensed her involuntary shudder.

"He's strange," Aunt Achsa hurried to explain, a tremble in her voice, "but he'll make friends fast 'nough. Goodness knows he ain't talked of much else than a new cousin's comin' sence we got your letter. This is your room, Sidney, right here handy,

and mebbe you'll like to wash up while I put supper on the table. Here, take this candle; it's darkened up fast."

"The "boarder" had already carried Sidney's bag into the little room that opened directly out of the parlor. Aunt Achsa, after bustling her in, closed the door quickly between them.

It was the smallest room Sidney had ever seen. Why, she could reach out from just where she was standing and touch the ceiling or anyone of the walls. And it was the neatest. The small panes of the window twinkled at her between starched muslin curtains, coarse but immaculate towels covered the washstand and the highboy that stood at each side of the window. Another white towel Achsa had tacked on the wall behind the washbowl and under the oval mirror. A cushion, much faded from many washings, she had tied to the back of the straight rush-bottomed chair at the foot of the bed. A smell of strong soap hung in the air.

Sidney could not know that the highboy was priceless, that the two blue vases which Achsa had risked leaving on top of it had come from a Spanish port a century before, that the woven cover on the bed had the date of its making in one corner, that the hooked rug on the floor could have brought Achsa a hundred dollars any time she wanted to sell it; her eyes were too brimming with tears to notice the flowers that grew to her window-sill and peeped over it at her, their bright heads nodding to the candle

gleam. The lump that had been growing and growing mastered her. She drew a long-quivering breath. She had come all the way from home for *this*. *This* was her great adventure!

Oh, it was too humiliating, too cruel! That dreadful old woman—if she'd only had a broom she would have looked just like a witch. And in a few minutes she'd open the door and make her go out into the kitchen and eat supper with them. They were going to eat in the kitchen. She had seen the table. And the boarder—nice people in Middletown did not keep boarders. And, oh, that dreadful Lavender and his big eyes, staring at her—that was the cousin! And she could not telegraph Trude until tomorrow at the earliest—

She could not cry. She must not. If she began she'd never stop. She knew now that the tears had been starting deep down within her miles back on her long journey. Her teeth bit into her quivering lip. She went to the little window and leaned her face against its frame. The fragrant salt-laden air caressed her hot face and soothed her.

"Shame on you, Sidney Romley," she finally muttered. "Remember you're fifteen. And you *wanted* to come—no one made you! Anyway—" She addressed a rose that was wagging its pink head at her in an understanding way and that certainly had not been there a moment before! "Anyway, I'll bet it won't be a *bit* worse than traveling with fat, cross old Godmother Jocelyn!"

CHAPTER VIII

MR. DUGALD EXPLAINS

SIDNEY had fallen asleep on that first night at Cousin Achsa's with the resolution to escape at the earliest moment possible from her humiliating situation; she would telegraph Trude in the morning.

But with errant sunbeams, as yellow as gold, dancing across one's face, with a tang of salt and pine in the air, fifteen is certain to rise up stout-hearted, despite all accumulated woe. Forgetting her bitter disappointment of the night before Sidney sprang from her bed and rushed to the window to look out upon her new surroundings.

There was not really much she could see, for the lane turned at Mrs. Ephraim Calkins' house and beyond her house a hillock of sand rose steeply to an azure blue sky. But Aunt Achsa's riotous flowers were smiling their brightest, at the opening of the hedge crouched Nip and Tuck regarding the morning with dignified satisfaction, over everything shone the alluring sun.

A sudden whiff of tobacco caught Sidney's attention. At the same moment the boarder emerged from the back of the house and walked slowly along the clam-shell path that skirted the bit of garden. He was evidently deep in thought. Suddenly he bent and

picked a flower. As he straightened his glance interrupted Sidney's curious speculations.

"Good morning, little half-cousin."

"Good morning," Sidney answered, quite cheerfully, thinking as she spoke that he was nicer looking in the garden than he had seemed in Cousin Achsa's kitchen the night before. "Is it early or late and is it your pipe that smells so good?"

"It's early. Aunt Achsa has gone on an errand, for I assured her that you would probably sleep until noon. You see I'd forgotten that you are—fifteen, did you say? And that smell—well, it may be the good Atlantic, or Lav's basket of fish, which is not likely. My best bet is that it's breakfast over at the Calkins'. I have an idea. I'll finish this pipe while you dress, then we'll run down and meet Aunt Achsa and incidentally I'll give you your first glimpse of the harbor. What say?"

Sidney indicated her willingness by drawing her head in from the frame of roses. She dressed with haste, splashing the cold water from the bowl over her face and scarcely disturbing the two braids of hair. In a few moments she joined the "boarder" in the garden, rousing him from a frowning contemplation of the little flower he had picked. At her "I'm ready" he put it into the pocket of his coat.

Unlike Sidney, Dugald Allan had *not* slept the night before. Argue as he would he could not shake the notion that he was responsible for Sidney's com-

ing. Because the idea had seemed to please Aunt Achsa he had encouraged her to invite the girl; to further humor her he himself had written the letter that he knew must have given Sidney's family a wrong impression of conditions at Aunt Achsa's. Its very tone had been unwittingly misleading He had not thought of that until he had caught the stricken look on Sidney's face the night before, observed her involuntary shrinking from the intimacy of the supper table.

Poor Aunt Achsa, it had been rather a ghastly supper in spite of all her efforts and her expectations: Lavender had huddled in his chair with his great soft eyes on Sidney; Sidney had been too frightened to eat or to answer by more than a monosyllable Aunt Achsa's eager questions; poor Aunt Achsa, in an agony of shyness and concern had fluttered over them all. It had been a relief when Sidney, pleading weariness from her long journey, took her candle from Aunt Achsa and went to bed. And later Allan could have sworn he heard the sound of sobbing from behind that closed door.

The whole thing had bothered him and kept him awake, thinking. And it was not alone Sidney's disappointment that moved him. He was stirred by a strong desire to make the girl know Aunt Achsa as he knew her, to love the noble spirit in the weather-beaten old body. Even Lavender. These people might indeed be his own so quickly did he rise in

their defense. "Well, they *are* my own!" he muttered. If this Sidney had been like the other fifteen-year-old girls who had crossed his path he would not have bothered, for they could not have been taught by any process to recognize the gold from the dross; but she seemed different. And he had caught the impression that she had come all this way for something that she had wanted very much to find. Her disappointment had bordered on the tragic. Well, it was no business of his, but he'd make amends by laying off work for a few days and playing around with her and Lavender.

He was a little taken aback when Sidney, clad in a middy and pleated skirt, for Trude's last injunction had been to brush and hang away the new suit in which she had traveled, joined him, no trace of last night's woe on her face. With Nip and Tuck following they tramped through the sand between the hollyhocks. Where the lane turned into the beach road Sidney stopped with a quick, delighted intake of breath. "Oh, the *boats!* Aren't they darling? I never saw so many. Why, the sails look all pinky!"

Dugald Allan explained that this was a trick of the sun and water. "Sometimes they are green and sometimes they are gray and deep purple. The fishing boats are starting out for the grounds. They've been waiting for the tide. That large schooner's headed for the banks—I think it's the *Puritan,* Jed Starrow's

new boat. She won't be back for a week or so. Most of the others will pull in by dark."

"Can I go out on one of them? Oh, you don't know how much I want to, I've never been in anything but a rowboat. And I can swim! Has Lavender a boat?"

"One can always find a dory one can use—whenever he wants one. And Lavender has the *Arabella,*"

It was on the tip of Sidney's tongue to ask "What is the *Arabella?*" and something more of this Jed Starrow whom she remembered Captain Phin Davies had mentioned, but another thought seized her, crowding out all others. From this boarder who seemed to want to be very nice to her, she might learn the answer to the riddle that was perplexing her.

"Mr.— Mr.—"

"Dugald, please. Won't you treat me like one of the family?"

"Mr.— Dugald, I—I want to ask you something. Prob'ly you'll think it's dreadfully rude but—you see, none of us, my sisters and me, really knew anything about Cousin Achsa and the Greens except what we found in a book in our attic—a sort of family tree book. But I wanted to go somewhere, so I wrote to her. I didn't tell my sisters until I got an answer back. Mr.—Dugald, can letters be awfully different—from people?"

A guilty shiver raced the length of Mr. Dugald's spine.

"What do you mean?" he parried.

"Why, I mean the letter I got back looked so *nice*. It looked as though the person who wrote it was—well, sort of rich and lived in a big house and—"

Dugald Allan motioned to an overturned dory.

"Suppose we sit here where we can see Aunt Achsa when she comes up the road. Now I'll make a confession. *I* wrote that letter for Aunt Achsa. She didn't feel quite up to the mark, her hand shakes and she's a little uncertain as to her spelling. I did not think at the time that I possibly might be giving you—your family—a wrong impression. Aunt Achsa was so happy at finding a relative, so touched that you knew something of her, that I only thought of furthering her delight. Anyway—" he faced Sidney's amazed eyes squarely; "You say you didn't know anything of Achsa Green except what you—well, you might say, dug out of the attic, weren't you taking a sporting chance when you came?"

Sidney flushed under the challenge in his tone. "I—I guess so. You see, I've never done anything *different*—like the other girls have, and I thought it was *my* turn to use the—the Egg, we call it. I wanted adventure. But I think I know what you mean; I ought not to be disappointed because my cousins aren't just what I thought they'd be—"

"Sidney—I've lived—well, a little longer than you have; you see I've had a chance to find out a few things about this world of ours and the people in it. There's one kind of an aristocracy that we find mostly in big cities—it comes up overnight, a sham thing made over with a gilding of money and wit, very grand on the outside but when you scratch it a little you find the common material underneath. Then there's an aristocracy that's the real thing way through—it's so real that it doesn't ever stop to think that it *is* an aristocracy. You find that mostly in old, forgotten, out-of-the-way places—like on Cape Cod. I think here it's more solid than the most, though it's fast dying; some day it'll be a thing only of romance. But the real Cape Coders are descended from pioneer men who followed the sea for an honest living, who put bravery and justice and charity and how to live humanly with their fellows above money. Most of 'em have been crowded out by a different kind of a commerce than they knew how to deal with; that's Lavender's father's story; others, the young ones, have scattered to inland places; some have saved enough money to keep their positions in their communities, like Captain Phin Davies; a few like your Cousin Achsa have nothing but the honor of their people. Miss Sidney, in your Cousin Achsa's old body there is a spirit that has come to her from men who were like the Vikings of old—she lives by their standards. She's never known anything but work

and poverty, but she faces it—square to the wind. And I've never known her to make a complaint or to utter a begrudging word to or of a soul. Isn't that nobility?"

"I adore the way you say it!" cried Sidney. "It's just like the things that come to me to say in my attic!"

"Huh? Your—what?" Amazed, Allan looked at her to see if she were making fun of him. But her face was alight with enthusiasm.

"You must think a great deal of Cousin Achsa."

"I do. But—wait, I have more I want to say. You see, I feel responsible on account of that letter—for your coming here. I want to tell you—about Lavender. You could not have known—knowing nothing of any of them—that poor old Lav wasn't—well, like other boys."

Sidney flushed. "No, I didn't. But then I didn't know there *was* a Lavender until I came."

"Look here—" Allan drew from his pocket the flower he had picked up in the garden. "I was racking my brain for some way to make you see Lavender as I see him—and then I found this. It was growing in a corner of the garden where the soil is poor and the wind harsh and where there isn't much sun; see, it's only half-size and the stem is crooked. But look into the heart of it—it's as beautiful as its fellows. Well—that's Lavender. After all his poor little body is only a shell—if the heart of him is fine

and straight, isn't that all that matters? Like the blossom of the flower. Can't you think of Lav like that?"

"I'll try to," promised Sidney, "and I'm ashamed dreadfully, to have been so disappointed—about everything. I'll take the sporting chance. Of course Vick would poke no end of fun at me if she knew how different everything is. But—" with sudden determination, "Vick shall never know." Then Sidney drew a long breath and let her thoughts revert to the *Arabella.*

"What *is* the *Arabella?*"

"Look beyond that schooner that's nosing into the tide."

"Why, that's a real boat."

"Oh, the *Arabella's* real enough. But she's been pensioned off—you might say; she's enjoying a peaceful old age on a sand bar. When the tide is out she's high and dry."

"And she belongs to Lavender?" incredulously.

Dugald Allan laughed. "The blood of his ancestors is strong in the boy. He wanted a boat. A boat of his own—poor lad. He used to hide on the fishing schooners until they'd clear the Point. So I bought the *Arabella* for him. Her owner was going to chop her up for kindling wood. She serves a good purpose—and a safe one, moored out there. Lavender sails the globe on her—and nothing can harm him.

"Oh, I see—just pretend. But even that's fun. Will he let me go with him?"

"I am sure he will. If you ask him to take you to the Caribbean Sea on his next voyage you'll win him completely."

"I'll help Lavender play the game for I know lots of different places—though they're mostly inside the map."

Dugald Allan was regarding Sidney with thoughtful eyes. She certainly was not in the least like the fifteen-year-olds he had assiduously avoided. "Some kid," he commented, inwardly. Aloud he ventured: "Will it be too inquisitive if I ask you what an Egg is? I see Aunt Achsa coming and I think you'll have just time to tell me—unless you'd rather not."

"An Egg? Oh, you mean *my* Egg. Of course you must have thought it funny! Why the Egg's the money that comes each year from a book my father wrote—Goosefeathers. He was always ashamed of it. So we—my sisters, you see, take turns spending the money any way we want to. This is my first turn. Oh, dear, I wasn't going to tell a soul."

"You don't mean to say that you have any—well, objection, to being known as the daughter of Joseph Romley?"

"Why, I'm not *ashamed,* of course not, for he was my own dad, and we loved him. Lots of times

he acted just as though he wasn't a poet. But—but I wanted to be my own self; that was to be part of my adventure. You see its awfully stupid always having to remember to act like a poet's daughter; at least it is for Victoria and me—my older sisters are so used to it that they do it naturally—"

But the astonishing boarder interrupted her with a roar of laughter. In fact, he seemed so amused and even delighted at something that he could not control his mirth. "You *are* the funniest kid!" Then he had to laugh again. "Did you say you were—only fifteen? And just how do poets' daughters *have* to act, anyway? I've only known —one. Well, I'll keep your secret. Only you'll let me talk about it with you once in a while, won't you? With everyone else you shall be as "different" as your heart desires. I don't believe Aunt Achsa knows. Now, let's go and meet her and assure her that you are ready for the biggest breakfast she can give you!"

"And do you think we can go out on the *Arabella* today?"

CHAPTER IX

SIDNEY TELLS "DOROTHEA"

After all Sidney never sent the telegram to Trude. But it must not be thought that all in a moment she adapted herself to her new surroundings, or saw Cousin Achsa as the "boarder" had pictured her; her anticipations had soared too high, on the wings of too agile an imagination, to surrender at once to their downfall. Even Dugald Allan she regarded with inward skepticism.

How she rebuilt her small world can be chronicled best by peeping over her shoulder one afternoon, the third day after her coming, as she wrote in her precious "Dorothea" book. At the last moment she had brought this with her, moved by a doubt as to the wisdom of leaving it behind; there was no knowing what liberties the Leaguers, left alone, might take.

"Dorothea Mine, you do not know how it comforts me to feel your dear pages. I am not alone for you are with me. And when I think how I almost left you at home. There is so much to write that I scarcely know where to begin and must needs sit with my pen suspended. This is the funniest place I ever saw but no one, absolutely no one but you, dear bosom friend, shall ever know that. I mean

it is funny because everything is just the opposite of what I expected it to be. I had thought, you see, that our relatives probably lived in a big white square house high up on a rock-bound coast against which the waves dashed in foamy crests. That's the way I wanted the house to look. And instead it is very small and all wigglety, with sand hills around it. But it is cute for the rooms are small like a doll's house. There is a kitchen in which we do everything which I did not like at first only it is a different kitchen and there is not any other place anyway for the parlor is so stiff and dressed-up looking that it would be shocking to muss it up. The kitchen smells good and shines it is so clean and there is a door that opens right out into the flowers. I shall not say much about Cousin Achsa because Dugald, who is the boarder, says that she is an aristocrat of solid material and he must know because he has lived here summers for a very long time. But she talks bad English like Huldah only she says 'I swum,' instead of 'Yah!' And she is queer looking but then all is not gold that glitters. But she is very kind to me and I think likes me and she cooks the grandest things and so much. She works all the time. I do not think I ever saw anyone who could work so fast. She is like she was wound up inside and had to keep working until she ran down.

"But pour out my heart I must about Lavender who is my cousin. You see I did not know I had a

young cousin until Phin Davies (of him I will record later), told me of the benefit and of the baby who would be sixteen now, he said. Then I became greatly excited in anticipation of a cousin about my own age to play with. And oh, what did I find! But only once will I truly describe him for I have promised Mr. Dugald to think of Lavender as the poor flower on the crooked stem and I make myself shut my inside eyes so that I cannot see that he is different. He is small for he only comes to my ears and his arms hang way down and he has funny, long fingers and one shoulder is higher than the other and he has a hump on his back. There, I have written the truth. Now I will remember the flower. Lavender has beautiful and very wise eyes and a low voice that sounds like music and a lovely name, like a name in a languishing novel. And he is dreadfully smart, and gets it all from the lots and lots of books which he reads to make up for not going to school. I suppose he hates to go to school and anyway his mind is working all the while other boys are playing ball and doing things he can't do. At least Mr. Dugald thinks it's that way. Mr. Dugald told me how to win Lavender's affection for he is terribly shy and that was by making a great fuss over Nip and Tuck who are the cats and Lavender is passionately fond of the cats. That was hard, too, for we never had any cats as you know and the only cat I ever touched was Mrs. Jordan's old Tommy when

I wanted him in a play Nancy and I were going to give in the attic and he scratched me. But I bravely took Nip and Tuck in my arms and you would have been surprised if you could have seen how beatified Lavender looked. At least that's the way Mr. Dugald said he looked afterwards. And he has liked me ever since. I mean Lavender, of course. I must digress to say a word of Nip and Tuck. They are extraordinary cats. They are quite old and big and black and I think they are solid aristocrats, too, and you can only tell them apart by a nick in Nip's ear that he got in a fight. They can lick any dog or cat in this part of Provincetown. They are terrors. And they are twins, I forgot to say. And they do the same things all the time like the Crooker twins at school. Lavender loves all animals. He is always bringing home some stray thing only Nip and Tuck will not let them stay and that makes Lavender sad.

"But I must not spend all my time telling you of my cousins and the cats when there is so much terribly exciting to write about. This is the most different place I ever knew. It is all sand and the houses look like doll's houses most of them and come right out to the funniest little streets that are not much wider that our sidewalks at home and all the nice houses have flowers around them somewhere. And they are mostly a lovely shiny gray that is pinky in the sun. Mr. Dugald says they get that way from the salt in the air and that most of the old houses

were shingled from the wood that was in old masts. And he says the reason flowers grow brighter and bigger here is because years ago the ships used plain earth for ballast and changed it when they got into the harbor and that there is soil right here in Provincetown from almost every corner of the world. I held a handful from Cousin Achsa's garden and pretended I knew it was from Algiers. There are a lot of stores on the Main street and some are like the stores home and Mr. Dugald says they are a shame. It is hard to walk on the sidewalk because it is so narrow and most of the time you have to walk in the street. And everybody talks to everybody else whether they know them or not or if they do not talk they smile. There are lots of Portuguese and they have beautiful eyes and lovely voices like Isolde's. I think Mr. Dugald means it's them who have crowded out the solid aristocracy, but they are nice for they make it seem just like I was in a foreign land. But most, most of all, I like the docks. Mr. Dugald laughs at me when I call them docks; but I always forget to call them wharves. They are all gray and crookedy, as though they were leaning against one another and when the tide goes out it leaves the posts all shiny and green. And there are funny little houses all along the edge of the beach that are something like the boathouses of Cascade Lake, only more interesting and people live right in them and have flower boxes all around them and

fix up weeny verandas over the water and go in bathing right out of their front doors. And some of them are fish lofts only Mr. Dugald says that consolidated companies (I do not exactly know what he means but will write it because he said it) have bought out all the small fish companies and that means that the men do not get enough for their 'catch' to pay for the expense and danger of their going out to sea. He says the Portuguese are satisfied to only get a little. Everyone knows Lavender and they let him go anywhere and on to the boats and everything and I follow him, though at first the little rowboats which Mr. Dugald calls dorys smelled so that it made me sick. But I did not want even Lavender to think I was afraid so I held my nose inside and went wherever he did. I cannot wear anything but my old clothes—but no one dresses up here like Pola probably does (page 102), which is a disappointment, for Vick let me bring her cherry crêpe de chine for she is very sure Godmother Jocelyn will get her some new dresses and I am simply dying to wear it.

"And now I must tell you about the good ship *Arabella*. It is a very old boat—I think it is a schooner—and Mr. Dugald says it has probably been in every port in the world. When it got too old to sail any more Mr. Dugald bought it for Lavender. And it is all Lavender's own. I am sure I never heard of anyone before having a real big boat just

to play on. But, then, Lavender is different. It is fastened with a great big anchor and can't move only when the water is in it swings around on it just as though it was going. And when the water is out the boat is up real high and looks so funny and lopsided, like that dreadful old drunken man who walked past school one day (page 65). Mr. Dugald and Lavender took me out to the *Arabella* the very first day. We went out in a rowboat—I mean dory, and Mr. Dugald rowed. Oh, it was so thrilling, my heart sang within my breast. It seemed as though I was going far out to sea and the little waves danced and were so blue and everything smelled so salty and there were boats all around and some of them moving with big sails and a three-masted schooner went right close to us—I mean we went right close to it because it was fastened—and I could breathe only with difficulty I was so excited. Dear friend—at that moment I said to myself I did not mind my relatives not living in a big house on an eminence. This, meaning all the boats and the lovely docks and things, is worth my quest. It was very hazardous climbing on to the *Arabella* for it wiggled so but at last we were on and then!—Oh! Do you know, it was like a pirate's ship. And it has a wheel and a little house and the cutest cabins downstairs and a funny little kitchen. I am going to ask Aunt Achsa—I have decided to call her that because she seems too old to be a cousin—to let me cook out on

the *Arabella*. Mr. Dugald will not let Lavender cook on it for fear he will set the boat on fire. It would be funny to have a boat burn right in the water, but then I have read of ships that burned at sea. Mr. Dugald has fixed everything up real nice and he goes out a lot and draws. He says that as long as I know how to swim I can go out anytime with Lavender. It is certainly the most different thing I ever dreamed of doing and next best to sailing far away on a young boat. The boat rocked like a cradle and we laid down on the deck in the sun and it was a delightful sensation. I am going to take books out there and I will sometime take you, dear friend, and write in you as I rock upon the bosom of the ocean—though this is a bay it is ocean water.

" Next most exciting to the *Arabella* was going to the backside which is what they call the other side of the Cape the side that is on the outside on the map. We tramped over for Mr. Dugald says that is the only way to navigate on Cape Cod. It was not the least bit hot for there was such a lovely breeze and the road is hard and right through sand hills that looked awfully big and just have a little grass on them and funny little trees. Mr. Dugald told me that the heavy winds keep shifting the sand and that after ever and ever so many years the whole Cape will be moved and maybe was somewhere else a long time ago and the State of Massachusetts is planting a lot of pine trees to hold it where it is now

and that the reason the trees look so small is that every fall and winter when the big storms come they blow the sand over them until they are almost buried. I suppose if one could dig down you would find a big tree. Mr. Dugald told me all this as we walked over the dunes. He told me how after one big storm years and years ago the school children went to school and found it buried under sand right up to the roof. I wish that would happen to my school. But that is how different this place is. Well, we finally came to a ridge of sand that was bigger and higher than any of the others so that it took my breath to climb it like the trail back of Cascade and then when I got to the top it was so beautiful that I felt hurt inside and felt afraid. Before me, dear friend, swept the endless ocean. And as far as eye could see there was naught but sand. And you seemed close enough to the blue in the sky to touch it. You felt it the way you do the furnace when you go into the furnace room. And not a living being anywhere around, except us. And the beach is the loveliest beach I ever dreamed of—and you see it is the first real beach I have ever seen. It is wide and hard and part of it is wet where the big waves roll in and it moans beautifully. And there are lots of little funny flowers, like wild sweet peas, and pretty grasses grow on it and the sand up away from the water is white and glistens like jewels. I did not like to go near the water at first

for the waves looked like angry monsters with tossing white manes tearing in at me with their arms raised to clutch me. But I kept close to Mr. Dugald who sometimes goes in swimming right in the breakers. And he pointed out the Coast Guard Station which was a cute little white house nestled in the sand dunes and he told me there was a man up in the square tower who was watching us and every move we made and if a wave did catch us he'd give the alarm and a lifeguard would dash out in a minute and save us. That would be very exciting but it did not tempt me. We picked up beautiful shells on the beach and I poked a horrid jelly fish and then we visited the Station where the men were very nice and showed us everything. The big man who is Commander Nelson told us how the sand when it blows against the windows of the house turns the glass all funny and frosted so that you cannot see out of it, and he said they have to keep putting in new glass every few days. And Mr. Dugald told me as we walked back how the men from the Coast Guard Stations patrol the shores of our country so that there is not a bit of our seacoast that is not guarded. One starts out from one station and meets another from another station and they exchange little checks which they take back so that their commanders know they have been all the way. Is it not a lovely feeling to think that as we sleep someone is watching our shores by night?

Only I wonder how if there are any pirates, and Captain Davies said there still were, they can land anywhere without one of these guards seeing them. Maybe they wait until the watchmen start back with their checks.

"I must now tell you of my new acquaintances.

"First there is Aunt Achsa and Lavender of whom I have written. Second, there is the boarder. His name is Dugald Allan which I think is a perfectly lovely name. I am sorry to say he is an artist. I would have preferred that he had been a fisherman. When I told him that he laughed very hard. He laughs at me a great deal which I did not like at first and then I decided it is his nature and he cannot help it. He spends every summer with Aunt Achsa and says he is her half-nephew. Even though he gave the *Arabella* to Lavender I think he must be a poor artist because his clothes look old and have no style. He knows everyone and everyone calls him Dug. At first I thought it was horrid visiting a relative who kept boarders but afterwards I learned that here in Provincetown someone else lives in nearly all the houses besides the families, because they are not nearly enough houses for all the people who want to come to Provincetown. Mr. Dugald says that artists and poets and musicians come here from all over the world for the inspiration. I cannot tell the men artists from the fishermen for they wear things like sailors but the women artists all wear big hats

and smocks all covered with paint. I am sure I saw a poet yesterday and I do not know what a musician would look like and Mr. Dugald said he did not know, either. That was one of the times when he laughed. But I said then and repeat now that there are enough other people around so that I do not mind the artists and poets.

"Third of my acquaintance is Captain Phin Davies. Aunt Achsa says he is very rich, that he was smart enough to buy up a lot of fishing boats and a storage house of his own and he could laugh at the Boston and New York people. But he used to sail a boat like Cousin Zeke's which is what they call my relative. And he is very, very nice and invited me to go to Wellfleet and visit him and his wife and Aunt Achsa says she does not see no harm in my going. Aunt Achsa's grammar is so bad that I blush to write it here.

"Fourth, Martie Calkins who is Mrs. Eph Calkins' granddaughter and lives in the house next to Aunt Achsa's. She is *very* different from the girls I know at school and Nancy would shudder if she saw her for Nancy is so sensitive, but then this is not Middletown and I am sensitive like Nancy and Mart is just my age and she can go out on the *Arabella* with us, though she told me confidentially that her grandmother thought Achsa Green stark daffy to trust Lavender out of her sight. Mart does not think about Lavender the way Mr. Dugald taught me to think. She can tell the grandest stories of the sea

because her father and grandfather were fishermen who went out on big boats and her father was lost at sea so she is an aristocrat, too. She is going to show me how to dig clams tomorrow. And we are going to the moving pictures on Saturday. It seems very queer and like home to have moving pictures here but Mr. Dugald says they are like the poor. To quote him exactly, 'Alas, the movies—like the poor, we have always with us!' He says very queer things.

"Fifth, Miss Letitia Vine, a most picturesque character. I quoted Mr. Dugald then for I did not know people could be picturesque. No one but Miss Letty herself knows how old she is and she won't tell. Aunt Achsa said she paid to have the date and year of her mother's death scratched off her tombstone so folks couldn't figure out her age. But she is very cultured and is a music teacher, only a funny one. She drives all over this part of the Cape and gives music lessons. She has done it for years and years, Aunt Achsa calculates she has worn out three horses teaching folks their notes. She stays in one town two or three days sleeping round with her pupils and then hitches up and drives to the next. She scorns a Ford. Mr. Dugald says he's thankful for that for a Ford would spoil the most perfect thing on the Cape. She looks like the figurehead of a ship (again quoting Mr. Dugald) and she isn't afraid of man or beast. She and Mr. Dugald are very good friends and Mr. Dugald took me there to call and I think he told her that I was the daughter of a poet,

because she looked at me like that though he had promised not to and I hate to think he broke his promise. She has very interesting things in her house that she has picked up from all over the Cape as she gave her music lessons. I guess she does not have many pupils now but Aunt Achsa said Letty Vine would have to die in the harness so that is probably why she keeps going.

" Sixth is Mr. Commander Nelson at the Coast Guard Station who invited me to come to see him again. He said if he needed a hand at any time he'd send for me. It would be exciting to help save souls from a wreck at sea. I would like to even see one though that sounds wicked and I must curb my thirst for adventure.

" Jed Starrows is not an acquaintance but I intend to know more about him. When anyone speaks of him they put such a funny tone in their voices. I asked Mr. Dugald if he is aristocratic too and he laughed and said he most certainly is not. But he owns a big boat—an auxilliary schooner that is the fastest one here and he has just bought out a fish company and Aunt Achsa says it beats everything where he gets his money because he wasn't much more than a common clam-digger a year or so ago. But I will record here that Captain Davies spoke of Jed Starrows as though he might know something about pirates and I mean to find out if I can.

" Enough now, dear friend—my arm aches and I must stop. Adieu for the nonce—"

CHAPTER X

MAIDS

And later Sidney wrote the following letter to her sisters.

"Dear Family:

"I have not written before because everything is so marvellously exciting. My telegram told you that I had arrived safely at Cousin Achsa's. The hours of my journey, all too short, sped on wings of happiness. Thus they are still speeding. This is the loveliest and the unusualest place and it is filled with quaint homes and the most interesting people. Our relatives are among the most aristocratic and Aunt Achsa, she wants me to call her that, is of the proudest blood of Cape Cod. She is very nice to me and asks a great many questions about you all and about our mother. She has a nephew who lives here who is only a year older than I am. And a family friend of Aunt Achsa's lives here summers and he takes Lavender (which is our cousin's name) and me out on a big boat which is most exciting.

"There is a girl about my own age who lives right next door and I think we will be very good friends. She is not at all like Nancy which I am glad as variety is the sauce of living. She is of pure Cape Cod blood, too.

"If I do not write often and only very little letters it is because I'm so busy, for I must make the most of every minute. I wish you would write to me an awful lot though and please send all of Vick's letters to me so that I will know what she's doing just as though I was home, and Trude, *you* write every day. And when you write to Vick tell her that I am having the most wonderful time. Be sure to do that. Loads and loads of love,

"Your sister, Sidney."

* * * * *

Kneeling against a half-packed trunk, Trude read Sidney's letter aloud to Isolde. Victoria had gone the day before.

"What do you think?" Trude asked, slowly, as she finished.

"Think? What do you mean? I'm glad the child's there safe and happy."

"But, Issy, that letter doesn't ring just—true. I know how Sid usually writes and talks. It's too brief and there's something, well—forced about it."

Isolde put down a box of papers she had been sorting over. Her conscience had troubled her not a little at letting Sidney go off alone among strangers, even though they were relatives, and now Trude's doubts sharpened the pricks.

"Forced? I didn't notice it. It was short, of course, but probably she is having too good a time to write a longer letter. Anyway, Trude, she's there safe,

and we're almost packed and our tickets are bought—it isn't going to do anyone a bit of good, now, to upset all our plans and bring Sid home. That's the way I look at it. And she would have been perfectly wretched here with the League Convention filling the house. It's dreadful to contemplate."

"I can't bear to think of Sid going out on boats with a harum-scarum boy—" Trude groaned.

"I don't feel half as concerned over the boats as I do wondering if living there in luxury may not spoil her for her own poor home—make her dissatisfied. She is probably meeting all the wealthy summer people—there are a lot on the Cape, you know."

Trude was still studying the letter as though to find something between the written lines.

"She wants me to write every day. That sounds a little homesicky. Well, I will, bless the kid's heart—no matter how rushed I am. And I will warn her in every letter to be careful around the boats. And not to get her head turned by our relatives' high estate, either. Isn't it funny, Issy, that we never knew they were wealthy—until now? Not that it would have made a bit of difference with Mother or Dad," she finished, defensively.

Isolde, her conscience quieted for the hundreth time, turned her attention to her box. She lifted out a small packet of letters tied together and handed them to Trude.

"These are yours."

One slipped from the packet and fell to the floor between the two girls. Trude picked it up quickly, a deep crimson sweeping her face.

"Why, it's one of *those letters*—" exclaimed Isolde, accusingly.

Trude nodded, guiltily. "I know it. I—I couldn't bear to destroy them all."

"Trude, dear, you don't care anything about that man—now?"

Trude forced a light laugh but her eyes avoided Isolde's searching glance. "Why, no—at least not in *that* way. If you like things in a person very much you just have to keep on liking them no matter what happens. And, Issy, it wasn't his fault that I—I imagined—he cared—for me—" Her voice broke. Isolde gave a quick little cry.

"Trude, you *do* care! And he isn't worth the tiniest heartache. He *must* have led you on to think things. And all the time he was playing with you. It makes me *furious!* You're such an old peach."

The "old peach" made no answer. There flashed across her mind all that Isolde had had to say before about this man; every fibre of her being shrank from a repetition that would bring pain as well as humiliation. She straightened.

"We are a couple of geese to dig all this up now. I was just sentimental enough to hang on to one of the letters—I suppose it's because they are the only letters I've ever had from a man—but I see my mis-

take now. I will destroy it." She slipped the letter into her pocket with the tiniest sigh. "So there." (But the letter was not destroyed.)

"I wish you'd meet someone down at the Whites' —some perfectly grand man. I should think Uncle Jasper would realize—"

Isolde's tone was so tragic that Trude laughed, now with genuine amusement. "I was thinking of some of Uncle Jasper's friends," she explained. "They are mostly nice, fat settled bankers and lawyers, but if any bachelor doctors, tinkers or tailors slip in I promise to flirt desperately—"

"Trude, you think I am joking and I am not. If you don't meet someone at the Whites' where *will* you meet him? What chance have you and I, shut up here, to know the kind of men we'd—we'd like to know? Do you think I enjoy the namby-pamby sort that flock here to sit in Dad's chair? No, indeed. And Trude—I'm—twenty-six next October! *I'm—an old maid!*"

Before Isolde's earnestness Trude unknowingly lowered her voice to a soft note. "Do you feel like that, too, Issy? I've felt that way often. I'm twenty-four. But I'm not afraid of being an old maid—I've always sort of known I'd be one—but I catch myself just longing to do *something* with my life, different—as little Sid put it. Then I chastise myself severely for my repinings. Anyway, it'll be fun watching Vick's and Sid's experiences, won't it?

Bless them, they seem to have escaped our bounds, don't they?"

"I am afraid my vicarious enjoyment of their adventures may be tempered with a little jealousy. I am not as noble as you are, Trude. It is hard to think that you and I have to go on sitting still and watching our lives go by—and our one and only life, remember!"

Trude shook herself a little—perhaps she was "chastising" her inner spirit. "Come, we mustn't get mopey on the eve of a holiday. They're too rare to spoil. And two trunks still to pack. Do you think the Leaguers will mind if we shroud that painting in the living-room. It's the best thing we own and I hate to have it get too dusty."

Isolde lifted her shoulders rebelliously. "I don't know what has happened to me but, do you know, Trude, I am beginning to think it's the limit that we have to consider the League in even a little thing like that. Thank goodness we *are* going to have a holiday! But I wonder if the summer will bring anything to any of us."

In answer Trude smiled down into the trunk. "Well—it's bringing something to Sid. Rather she went out and got it. And it surely will to Vick, new clothes if nothing more. And I hope it will to you, too, Issy, dear, something grand and—contenting."

It was typical of Trude that she did not think of herself.

CHAPTER XI

INDEPENDENCE

"Golly day, but I'm tired!"

Martie Calkins threw herself on the cool sand of the beach and gave vent to a long breath. Sidney, standing over her, wished she could do likewise with the same picturesque abandon. Mart was so splendidly "I don't care a hang"; her tumbled hair now was thick with sand, across her tanned face was a smear of black, her shabby blouse was torn and open at the throat exposing her chest to the hot sun, her bare, hard-muscled legs were outstretched, the heels digging into the sand and the grimy toes separating and curling like the tentacles of a crab.

"Oh, this is the life," she sang. "Sit down and make yourself at home. This beach's yours as much as mine I guess."

Sidney sat down quickly lest her companion guess how she was tied inside with the innumerable bonds and knots of conventions, century old, which Martie had somehow escaped. Of course Sidney herself did not think it that way; she only knew that she felt ridiculously awkward with Martie Calkins in spite of her growing determination to be just like her.

They had been friends now for two whole weeks, the shortest two weeks Sidney had ever known simply

because into them they had crowded so much. She had met Mart the day after her coming to Sunset Lane. Mart had appeared at Aunt Achsa's with some baking soda her grandmother had borrowed two months before. Aunt Achsa had said: "I cal'late you two girls better make friends." That was so obviously sensible that Sidney quickly put from her the impression that Mart was the "queerest" girl she had ever met. She had *seen* queerer but had never *talked* to them. But Mart was young and frankly friendly and lived next door and, anyway, everything was so very different here that it was ridiculous to expect to meet a girl like Nancy or the others at school or perfect like Pola.

Before Mart's experience, her knowledge of the sea and boats, her background of seafaring ancestors, her easy assurance, Sidney's pleasant sense of superiority soon went crash. Too, Mart revealed a quality of strongheartedness and a contentment with everything as it came along that amazed Sidney at the same time that it put her own restlessness to shame. Why, Mart, in all her life, had never been farther than Falmouth and had gone there to a funeral, but she had none of Sidney's yearnings to "see places." Pressed by Sidney's inquiries she had answered, with a deceiving indifference: "Oh, what's the use of wanting to go anywhere, it's nice enough here." Nor did Mart's multitudinous tasks embarrass her; she would keep Sidney waiting while she finished

scrubbing the kitchen floor. And she had a way of swishing her brush that made even this homely labor seem like play until Sidney, watching from the safety of a chair, her feet securely tucked between its rungs, longed to roll up her own sleeves and thrust her arms into the sudsy water. Martie had to work much harder than any girl Sidney had ever known or heard about; she did a man's work and a woman's work about her home and did not even think it was out of kindly proportion to her years. "Oh, there's just gran'ma and me and she has rheumatiz awful," she had explained just once to Sidney. That was why, of course, Martie looked so unkempt and overgrown and had had so little schooling, but Sidney came to think these shortcomings and their cause made Martie the more interesting.

Though after a week Sidney could toss her head like Mart, run as fast, go barefooted, sprinkle her chatter with a colloquial slang that would have horrified the League, affect ignorance to anything schooly, she found that it was not easy to emulate Mart's fine independence. There was always that feeling of being tied to the things ingrained within her.

Mart's ease with everyone, young or old, gave her, in Sidney's eyes, the desirable quality of grown-upness. Mart talked to the fishermen and the women who were her grandmother's friends and the artists and the tradespeople exactly as though she were their equal in point of years; Sidney, marvelling and

admiring, did not know that this assurance was really a boldness that had grown naturally out of there just being "gran'ma and me." Martie had had to hold her own since she was six years old.

Though from the first day of her coming Sidney, moved by a sense of the courtesy to be expected from a guest, had insisted that they include Lavender in all their plans, at the same time she had wished that he would refuse for she could not conquer a shyness with him. He was a boy and she had never known any boys very well, and he was a "different" boy. But Mart did not mind him at all; she played tolerantly with him, quarreled cheerfully and bitterly with him, laughed with him and at him exactly as though he were a girl like herself or she the boy that she should have been, gran'ma considered.

On this day Mr. Dugald had taken Lavender to the backside. He had not invited the girls to join them which had roused Sidney's curiosity. She had watched them depart, loaded down with books and stools and an easel and a box of lunch and had wondered what they were going to do all day, alone, in the dunes. She was soon to know that those hours were sacred to Lavender, that in the great silences of the sandy stretches he and his Mr. Dugald with their books went far from the Cape and Sunset Lane and the crooked body.

The girls, left to themselves, had decided to go clamming. Of all the novel things she had done in

the last two weeks Sidney liked clamming best. It was even more fun than the *Arabella* for after all the *Arabella* was only pretend. She liked to feel her bare toes suck up the goosy sand as she stepped over the wet beds. She could never dig as fast as Mart or Lavender because she had to stop and watch the sky and the clouds and the moving sails and the swooping seagulls. "You'd never make a living digging clams," Martie had scolded. (Mart herself could dig faster than old Jake Newberry who had peddled clams through the town for fifty years. Mart had sometimes sold hers at the hotels.)

"There's so much to *look* at!" Sidney had answered, drawing in a long happy breath.

"*Look* at! What? All I can see is sky and water and a lot of that and that ain't nothing new."

"But it is always different! The sky gets bluer and the clouds pinker and the water dances just as though there were sprites hiding in each wave."

"Gee, anyone 'ud think you were a poet!" Mart had laughed and at that Sidney had fallen hastily to digging.

Now, as they lay on the beach, hot and happy, their basket of clams between them, Sidney's thoughts went back to Lavender's and Mr. Dugald's mysterious departure.

"We've had just as much fun," she declared, aloud.

"What d'you mean? Oh—Lav. Pooh, yes.

Who'd want t'go off in the sand and sit in the hot sun all day? *I* wouldn't."

"Aunt Achsa packed them an awfully good lunch," Sidney reflected.

"Sure she did. She spoils Lav like anything. Gran'ma says it's a shame. And what *she* doesn't spoil that boarder does."

For an instant Sidney flared with resentment at her companion's tone. However she realized that she was at a disadvantage in that she had only known these people for only two weeks and Mart for her whole lifetime.

"What do you s'pose they do over there?"

Mart shrugged her shoulders. "I used to be curious but I'm not any more. They go off somewhere like that together all the time, packed up 'sif they were headin' for a whole winter's cruise. I guess I know. Like as not the boarder's paintin' Lav's picture and Lav don't want him to do it where people'll see on account of his being crooked." Mart, satisfied with her explanation, stretched herself luxuriously, her arms upflung.

Sidney shuddered. "Oh, why should he want to paint Lavender's picture? I think he's cruel!" Then she remembered Dugald Allan's allusion to the flower on the crooked stem. "Maybe he's painting Lav's spirit."

At this Mart raised herself on her elbow, stared at Sidney, and burst into a loud laugh. "Oh, that's

the *best!* Lav's spirit! Oh, *my!* You're the funniest kid. Say, don't get sore but I just have to howl, you're so rich." She threw herself back in the sand and rolled from one side to the other.

Sidney sat very still biting the lips that had betrayed her. She'd remember after this; she'd never make another slip that would provoke Mart to such amusement. Mart began looking hard at her again and she squirmed uneasily under the scrutiny. But Mart only asked:

"Say, ain't your hair awful hot?"

Relieved, Sidney answered promptly, "Yes. I hate it." She gave a fling to the heavy braids.

"Why do you have it then? I'd cut it off. I cut mine. I wouldn't be bothered with a lot of hair. I s'pose your folks would make an awful fuss if you did, though."

Sidney twisted her bare toes in the sand and frowned down at them. Yet it was not at their whiteness she frowned but at a sudden recollection of Mrs. Milliken's: "Always wear your hair like that, my lamb, it is so beautifully quaint."

"I don't know that they'd mind. It's my own hair. I've thought of having it cut often."

Mart sat upright. "Say, I'll do it for you—if you want me to. We can go straight home now. We'll divide our clams when we get to our house. That is if you're not afraid."

"Afraid—of just cutting my hair? I may look

a sight but who cares? I'll do it. Come on!" Sidney sprang to her feet, a challenge in her voice that Mart, of course, could not understand.

Mart rose more leisurely and took the dripping basket of clams and seaweed. They were not far from Sunset Lane. It took them but a few moments to reach the Calkins' house—not long enough for Sidney's courage to falter.

"Gran'ma isn't home, but anyway she wouldn't say anything. She lets me do just as I please. She never said a word when I cut my own hair. Sit down here and I'll find the shears in a jiffy."

Sidney sat down in a rush-bottomed chair, thrilling pleasantly. This was a high moment in her life—the clipping of the two despised braids; a declaration of independence, a symbol of a freedom as great as Mart's. And certainly Mart must be impressed by the way she had responded to the suggestion. "Afraid!" Well, Mart might laugh at things she said but she would see that she was quite her own mistress.

Mart returned with a pair of huge shears.

"Of course I can't do it as good as a regular barber but it'll be good enough for the first time and around here, anyway. Sure you don't mind? Your hair *is* dandy!" While she was speaking she was unbraiding one pigtail. She shook it out. "It's awful thick and wavy. Mebbe you could sell it. I've heard of girls doing that but I don't know's there's

any place around here. Sit still, now, so I can get it straight."

Click. Sidney shut her eyes and sat rigid with a fearful certainty that she must suffer physical pain from the operation. Click. The touch of the steel against her neck sent icy shivers down her spine.

"There, now—it's off," cried Mart, taking a step backward. "It's sort of crooked but that won't show when it's all loose. Go in gran'ma's room and take a look at yourself."

Sidney turned and stared stupidly at the mass of hair in Martie's hand. It *was* beautiful hair. For an instant she wanted to cry out in a violent protest; she checked it as it rose to her lips. Mart's eyes were on her. She managed instead a little laugh. "It feels so *funny.*"

"Oh, you'll get used to that. You'll like it. Take a look now and say I'm some barber."

Gran'ma Calkins' old mirror, hung where the light shone strong upon it, reflected back to Sidney a strange and pleasing image.

"Why *I like it!*" she cried, running her fingers through the mass. "It's—it's—so *different.* It's jolly."

"You won't have to bother combing it much, either. I don't touch mine sometimes for days."

Sidney, still staring at the stranger in the old mirror, laughed softly. "Wait until Nancy sees it. Nancy hair is straight as can be or I'll bet she'd cut

hers. And Issy. Issy will have a fit when she knows. And Mrs. Milliken!" Here she broke off abruptly, not even in her triumph must she give hint to Mart of the League and its hold upon the house of Romley. "Oh, I like it!" she repeated exultingly. "And it won't be half the bother." She felt now that she was Mart's peer in point of abandon.

"You don't think your Aunt Achsa will make a fuss, do you?" asked Martie, with tardy concern.

"Aunt Achsa? Oh, no! At least—" It had not occurred to Sidney that Aunt Achsa had anything to say about it. "She lets me do anything." Which was quite true. But something of Sidney's exultance faded; she was beginning to wish that she had just said *some*thing to Aunt Achsa about it before she let Mart clip her braids—not exactly asked permission but confided her intentions. That Mart might not perceive her moment's perturbation she turned her attention to the clams.

"I ought not to have half for I didn't find nearly as many as you did."

"Oh, rats. Take 'em. All you want." To Mart, who could dig clams faster than old Jake Newberry, an accurate division of their spoils meant nothing. To Sidney who dug awkwardly each clam was a treasure.

Her step lagged as she approached Aunt Achsa's. She hoped Aunt Achsa would not be home. Then she wondered why she could not be as confidently

defiant as Martie; she supposed it was the restraint of the League and the three sisters under whom she had had to live and Martie had not. But it was absurd to feel even apprehensive of Aunt Achsa's displeasure when Aunt Achsa was such a little thing and so indefinite a relative.

Aunt Achsa was in the kitchen trimming the edge of a pie. She was holding it high on the tips of her fingers and skilfully cutting the crust with a small knife when under it she spied Sidney's shorn head. She promptly dropped the pie upon the table upside down. A trickle of red cherry juice ran out over the spotless table.

"Why, I *swum!* Sidney Romley! Wh—what have you gone and done? What's ever happened to you?"

"My hair was so hot and *such* a bother. I can swim now and won't have to sit around for an hour drying it. I *hated* my braids—" All good arguments which rang true but did not seem to convince Aunt Achsa who continued to stare at Sidney with troubled eyes.

"It's *my* hair, Aunt Achsa. If I look a sight it's my own fault."

"That ain't it, child. Only—it's so sudden. Your—*doing* it—without a word or—or anything. What'll your folks say? I—I—kind a wish you'd just *told* me, you see."

Sidney laughed with a lightness she did not feel.

Aunt Achsa eyes were so reproachful, even hurt. "Why, I did not have time to tell you. I didn't think of it myself until a few moments ago. And Mart offered to do it for me. It's such a little thing to make any fuss about."

The cherry juice went on dripping until a big round stain disfigured the tablecloth and still Aunt Achsa stared at Sidney with troubled eyes.

"It's a little thing, of course. But I was thinkin' —Sidney, promise your Aunt Achsy you won't go off and do anything *else* high-handed like without tellin' me. I don't want to be worryin' or suspicionin' what you're up to or havin' your sisters blame me for something that ain't just right to their thinkin'. Mebbe we don't do things same as you do but we know what's right and what's wrong same as anyone." Which was a long and stern speech for Aunt Achsa. She gave a frightened gasp at the end and turned the poor pie right side up.

A dark flush had swept Sidney's face. There was no such thing as freedom *any*where—there must always be someone in authority somewhere to warn and rebuke, even this absurd little old woman, who seemed so remotely related. She wished she could think of something very withering and at the same time dignified to retort.

"I think I am perfectly capable of knowing what is right and what is wrong and my sisters have *perfect* confidence in me," she said slowly and with deep

inward satisfaction. Then she added scornfully: "Of course it *is* very different here and if I don't seem to get used to it you can't blame me!" With which she stalked through the parlor to her room and slammed the door.

Aunt Achsa pattered after her.

"Child! Child!" she called through the door. "Here's a letter for you. I was that taken back when I saw you I forgot to give it you." She slipped the letter through the inch of opening that Sidney, now tearful, vouchsafed her.

The letter was from Trude. To poor Sidney this was the crowning humiliation; it was exactly as though Trude could look out from the pages and see the mutilated locks. Trude had always loved her hair and had often brushed it for her for the simple delight of fingering its wavy strands. More than once Trude had said: "You're lucky to have this hair, kid. Look at mine." Now she would gasp in horror as Aunt Achsa had done. "You should not have done it, Sidney—at least without consulting one of us." It was not the deed itself even Trude would censure—it was her independnce. Oh, how terribly difficult it was to be like Mart!

Trude had written to her almost daily, sketchy letters full of the news of what she was doing at the Whites. Sidney could not know that Trude purposely made them lively and wrote them often because

she believed Sidney was homesick. In this letter her concern had reached the height of sacrifice.

"If you're ready to go home, have had enough of Cape Cod, just say the word, little sister, and I'll join you at Middletown. Perhaps you have been with Cousin Achsa long enough—you do not want to impose upon her hospitality. She may have other friends she wants to invite to her house. But you must decide at once for Mrs. White is making plans for the next few weeks and will want to know if I am going to be here. She is perfectly wonderful to me and I think she likes to have me here and that I help her a little, but if you want me to join you at home she will understand.

"Why in the world haven't you written to me? I shall scold you soundly for that when we are together. Be a good girl and remember how much we all love you. I shall expect a letter within three days at most telling me what you want to do."

Sidney gasped. Her barbered hair, Aunt Achsa, were forgotten for the moment. Go home—leave all her fun and Sunset Lane and Mart—and Lavender? Her consternation gave no room for the thought that two weeks had indeed worked a strange conversion. Why, she would sit right down and write to Trude that she did not *want* to go home. That was silly!

Then she thought of the hurt on Aunt Achsa's face only a few moments before when she had flung

her angry retort at her. And Aunt Achsa had been so good to her! Why, that cherry pie that had come to such a disastrous end Aunt Achsa was baking just because she had said she adored cherry pies. That was Aunt Achsa's way of showing affection. That Aunt Achsa had trusted her—she had given her complete freedom in the two last whirlwind weeks because she had *trusted* her. And how ungrateful, now, Aunt Achsa must think her. Well, she had punished her own self for now, of course, Aunt Achsa would *want* her to go.

CHAPTER XII

SIDNEY BELONGS

SIDNEY was too deep in her slough of despond to see that behind Mr. Dugald's shock of surprise was a smiling admiration of her bobbed head. And even Lavender avowed at once that it "looked swell." Two hours before Sidney would have gloried in their approval but with Trude's letter in her pocket and the humiliating memory of her silly retort to Aunt Achsa she was beyond feeling pleasure at anything.

She ate her supper in a heavy silence. Lavender's and Mr. Dugald's high spirits seemed to her as unfitting as jazz at a funeral. She kept her eyes carefully away from Aunt Achsa's face and found a faint solace in only nibbling at the especially delectable supper until Aunt Achsa asked her anxiously if she "wa'n't well?"

She felt infinitely far removed, too, from the curiosity that had obsessed her throughout the day. It didn't matter now what Mr. Dugald and Lavender had been doing over there among the sand dunes!

The next morning Lav invited her to go with him while he helped Cap'n Hawkes take a fishing party out to the *Mabel T.* This was one of the odd jobs Lavender often did around the harbor. Sidney had

gone with him twice before and had thoroughly enjoyed it. It was fun to sit in the bow of the old dory and watch the harbor lazily coming to life in the bright morning sun, sails lifting and dipping to the breeze, boats swinging at their moorings, the low roofs of the houses on the shore glistening pink against the higher ridges of sand, the dancing waves, their tips touched with gold. She liked to listen to the noisy chatter of the picnicers, to most of whom everything was as novel as it was to her; the women invariably squealed as they climbed aboard the *Mabel T* just as she had squealed the first time she boarded the *Arabella.* And her greatest thrill came when the tourists took her for a native, like Lavender, asking her questions which she invariably answered glibly.

This was probably the last time she would go out in the harbor with Lavender. She thought it, sitting very still behind a barricade of bait pails and baskets. She glared at a tanned girl who was telling her companion that they were going to stay on at the Cape through August. The brightness of the morning only deepened her gloom—she could stand things *much* better if it were pouring rain.

The fishing party and all the paraphernalia shipped safely aboard the *Mabel T,* Lavender let the dory drift as Sidney had begged him to do the first time she had gone out. He looked at her anticipating her noisy pleasure only to find her eyes downcast, her face disconsolate.

She felt his glance questioning her and lifted her head.

"I've got to go home."

That he simply stared and said nothing was balm to her. And she caught, too, the strange expression that flashed into the boy's great dark eyes.

"I got a letter yesterday from Trude. She thinks I've stayed long enough—that I am imposing upon Aunt Achsa's hospitality."

Still Lavender said nothing. Now he was looking off to where the sails of the *Mabel T* cut the blue of the sky like the wings of a great bird.

"She wants me to write at once just when I am going." Which was of course not *exactly* the way Trude had written and yet was the correct interpretation Sidney now put upon her letter.

And still no word from Lavender.

"I—I hate to go. Dreadfully. Will you miss me the least bit, Lav? I—I mean you and Mart—"

"Oh, *hang* Mart!" burst out the boy hotly. "Who cares 'bout her? I can fool 'round with her *any*time only I don't want to. I—I—" He stopped short with a queer inarticulate sound and Sidney gasped. Why, Lavender was almost crying!

He really *was* crying only he was swallowing it all with funny gulps that lifted his crooked shoulders. Sidney's heart gave a happy leap.

"Oh, Lav, I'm so *glad* you are sorry that I am going. We have had such fun together and you see

I've never known any boys before—oh, except the ones I've met at parties and things and they're terribly stupid. But you have been such a peach to me and showed me how to do everything just as though I was a boy. I'll miss you, too, Lav—"

"Oh, no, you won't. I mean it isn't the same," muttered Lavender, his shoulders quiet now. Across his face settled a sullenness that Sidney had never seen on it. She did not like it; it made him look ugly. She turned away. The boy went on, in a thick voice.

"Y'see, I never do anything with anyone because, well—I'm different. That's why. I c'n always see them lookin' at me curious or pitying and I won't stand it! I just *won't*. I hate it. That's why I wouldn't ever go to school. Some of the kids wouldn't come near me—'fraid of touchin' me, I guess. And some'd *try* to touch me—for luck, y'know. It's always been like that—and I get awful lonesome. But some day when I'm grown up I'm going to save money and go away. Out in the big cities there are lots of people that are different—all kinds of shapes and colors and everything and they are too busy to stop to pity you. Mr. Dugald says so. I'm goin' to study and learn to be a doctor. Not the kind that goes around to see folks like Dr. Blackwell but the kind that works in a big laboratory and finds out what cures the sick people. They are just as important, Mr. Dugald says. And no one will *see* me then

—they'll just *know* about me. I don't care how old I am, I'm going to do it some time."

Before the sudden fire in his voice Sidney's heart quickened with excitement. Why, Lavender was revealing to her his innermost soul and it was fine and straight, just as Mr. Dugald had said.

"Oh, Lavender, you're *wonderful!*" she cried, her eyes shining. "It must be grand to know just what you want to do and I hope you *won't* have to wait until you're very old. I'm glad you told me. Only, only—" a doubt assailed her. "Won't you *have* to go to school?"

Lavender flushed. "Sometime, I s'pose. But not here. Mr. Dugald understands how it is and he's helped me. And he says I know more than the other fellows in the grade I'd be in if I had kept on going. He sends me books all winter long and Miss Letty hears me and she got some examination papers from the teachers at school and I tried them and gee, they were a cinch. Only don't tell anyone—Mart, anyway," he admonished, in sudden alarm. "It's a secret between me and Mr. Dugald and Miss Letty. Let 'em think I'm a loafer."

The sullen look that had made Lavender's face so ugly disappeared under Sidney's understanding. And she in turn forgot her own sorrow in her joy of Lavender's confidences. Now the golden sun and the dancing water gladdened her and lifted her spirit; all *was* well in the world.

"I won't tell a soul—*not* a soul, Lav. Oh—" gasping, " is that what you and Mr. Dugald do when you go off like you did yesterday?"

Lavender nodded with a sheepish grin. "Yep, that's our school."

" Oh, what *fun!* To study like that. *I'd* learn a lot, too. Mart and I were dreadfully curious and Mart said she knew that Mr. Dugald was painting you and didn't want to do it where anyone might see you on account of—" Poor Sidney stopped. abruptly in sorry confusion.

" Oh, that's all right! I don't care what *you* say because you don't feel sorry for me. That's why I like to have you 'round. *You* think I can do something. Sidney, Mr. Dugald says there was a man who was an electrical wizard and knew everything and what he didn't know he worked over until he found out and he—he—was—like me—only worse. I'll work—gee, how I'll work—if I get a chance—" Lavender clenched his long fingers together and his dark eyes glared fiercely. " I'd cut and run now from here—if it wasn't for Aunt Achsa."

" Oh, yes,—Aunt Achsa." That brought Sidney sharply back to her own troubles.

" She's been awful good to me and I can't leave her now even though I don't do much. Mr. Dugald says that just now my job's right here and I must show folks that my back can carry its job even if it is—"

"*Don't,* Lav—" cried Sidney, near to the pity that Lavender despised, but he was too engrossed in his own feelings to notice it.

"Of course you can't leave Aunt Achsa. Lav, I feel so cheap and—and—horrid. I was very rude to Aunt Achsa yesterday and hurt her feelings which was ungrateful of me after her letting me come and doing everything here to make me happy. It was about my hair. I—I—oh, I won't even *repeat* what I said—it was so silly. And *that's* really why I must go home. Trude didn't exactly tell me I had to go—she just said perhaps I ought to go and that I must decide. But of course I know now—after yesterday—Aunt Achsa would not want me to stay—"

"Say, is *that* all! As though Aunt Achsa is holding anything against you! Why, she's the most forgivingest person you ever heard of. She wants to forgive anyone before they've done anything. She's like that. I'll bet the next second after you said it she'd forgotten what you said."

"But it's worse to hurt anyone like that!" cried Sidney miserably, yet with her heart lifting. For a thought was taking shape—a reasonable and just thought.

"Lavender—do you think—as long as *you* like to have me here—that that would sort of make up for my rudeness? I mean—can't I go and ask Aunt

Achsa to let me stay? I'll tell her how ashamed I am."

"Gee, you're square!" exclaimed Lavender, proudly. "I'll tell you—we'll go together and ask her. I know just what she'll say but you'll feel more honest about it."

"Lav, you're wonderful—the way you understand." Sidney's responsive mood leaped out to the boy's. Lavender had found something in her that was above his estimation of girls. And *she* had been vouchsafed a glimpse into the heart that lay beneath the crooked body—with its sensitiveness, its ambition. "We're just like pals," she finished shyly, "And I'm as proud as can be." Mentally she was resolving to live true to Lavender's standard. *That* would be much finer than to try to be like Mart. In her effort to attain Mart's showy independence she had—almost—come to grief, not quite. Lavender seemed certain that Aunt Achsa would want her to stay. And he had said he would go with her while she apologized which would make it as easy as could be.

"Let's go now!" she said aloud, unmindful of the fact that Lavender could not possibly be following her high flight of thought.

"Where?"

"Home—to Aunt Achsa." Sidney said it very simply. And to her it seemed like home, now. With a warm feeling in her heart she thought of

herself as truly belonging to them all and to Sunset Lane and the homely cottage.

"All right." With a dexterous motion Lavender swung his strength into the oars. The dory cut the shining water. Sidney stared solemnly straight ahead, going over in her mind just what she would say to Aunt Achsa.

At sight of the two Aunt Achsa paused in one of her multitudinous tasks. It was not usual for either the boy or the girl to appear until noontime. Her first thought was an anxiety that something had happened. She fluttered out to meet them.

"There ain't anything happened, has there?" her fond eyes on Lavender.

"I'll say something's *most* happened," the boy began. "Sidney here thinks she ought to go home on account of something she said yesterday—"

"Lav, let me do it," implored Sidney. "Aunt Achsa, I—I'm so ashamed of the way I answered you yesterday about my hair. I ought to have told you—you had a right—but I guess I wanted to feel grown up and independent. And I am sorry."

At Sidney's halting confession Aunt Achsa looked what Lavender, with his odd coinage of words, had described as the "most forgivingest person." She actually blushed.

"Why, law's sake, child, your Aunt Ascha didn't mind—don't worry your little head over that. I ain't forgotten how a girl feels even if it was a

long spell ago that I was fifteen. Old as I am my tongue gets loose in my head lots of times and runs away with itself. That's a way tongues has of doing. And you worryin' over it and thinkin' about going home! Why, why—it's *nice* to have you here. Only last evening I said it to Mr. Dugald. It's like you were one of us—"

"Do you really mean that, Aunt Achsa? I'm not company any more or—or—a distant cousin?"

"Not a bit. And now long's you and Lavender's come home in the middle of the morning, which I will say give me a turn, you can set down on the step out there and pit these cherries for me!"

"Cherry pie?" cried Sidney, glad over everything.

"Better. I'll bet pickled cherries!" Lavender had spied the row of glistening glass jars on the table. "And they're licking good."

Sidney took the checkered apron Aunt Achsa handed her and tied it about her slim person, then they sat down upon the step in the sunshine and fell to their task. From the shade of the lilac bush Nip and Tuck regarded them with their inscrutably wise eyes. Without doubt Nip and Tuck knew why Sidney's voice lifted so gaily as the red juice trickled down her brown arms.

When Mr. Dugald returned for dinner he had to hear how nearly Sidney had come to going home. "Why, that's the worst thing I've heard," he ex-

claimed with exaggerated alarm, "Now, you wouldn't really go and do that, would you?" His eyes laughed above the serious twist of his lips; Sidney wondered if he was remembering that first night of her coming.

"I think we ought to celebrate this crisis through which we have lived," he declared. "What say to a picnic supper over at the backside and a call upon Captain Nelson. He'll be expecting us about this time. If I commandeer Pete Cady's Ford you can go, too, Aunt Achsa."

When he was in his rollicking mood Aunt Achsa could never resist her Mr. Dugald. Though she'd as soon trust herself in one of "them ar-y-planes" as in Pete Cady's Ford, which only went under stress of many inward convulsions and ear-splitting explosions, she accepted Mr. Dugald's invitation and fell at once to planning the "supper," though their dinner was not yet cleared away.

"I'll write a letter and mail it and then stop and tell Mart. Mart may go, may she not?" Sidney asked anxiously.

Yes, Mart must go, too. Plainly the occasion *was* a momentous one.

And to Trude Sidney wrote, hastily, for Lavender was waiting and there would be time for a swim on the *Arabella* before they started off in the Ford.

"—Aunt Achsa and Lavender both want me to stay *very* much. They like me and I am just one

of the family. I help Aunt Achsa too, in a great many ways and Lavender and I are like pals—it's just as though I had a brother which I never thought would be any fun but now I know it would be a lot especially if the brother was a twin. You must not worry when I do not write often for there is so much to do that I don't have a bit of time—"

And in her excited state of mind Sidney forgot to tell Trude about her shorn braids.

CHAPTER XIII

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS

ROCKMAN'S WHARF was the center of the fishing activities of the town. To it, each day, the small fishermen came in their dories with their day's catch. From it motor boats chugged off to the bigger boats moored in the bay, some schooner was always tied to the gray piles waiting to be overhauled or to be chartered for deep sea fishing. There was always something to watch on Rockman's, or someone to talk to. The fishing folk spent their leisure hours loafing in the shadow of the long shed, smoking and talking; often the artists boldly pitched their easels and stools in everyone's way and painted a gray hull and a pink-gray sail, checkered with white patches, or a dark-skinned Portuguese bending to the task of spiking shiny cod from the bottom of a dory and throwing them to the wharf to be measured and weighed.

Sidney never failed to thrill to the changing scenes that Rockman's offered. She had become, like Mart and Lavender and a score of other youngsters, a familiar figure on the old wharf. With the ease of a Cape Coder born she talked to the Portuguese fishermen and to the men who worked in the shed and to Captain Hawkes, who when he was not on the

Mabel T sat on a leaning pile smoking and waiting for tourists to engage him. She knew the fishermen and their boats by name and was as interested in how much old Amos Martin got for his beautiful catch as Amos himself. Rockman's knew her as "that summer gal of Achsa Green's." "She beats all for askin' questions," it agreed, smilingly. "Ain't anything misses *that* gal!"

Sidney certainly did not intend anything should. She had to make up for all the years she had not lived in Provincetown and if she watched and listened closely she might some day catch up with Mart and Lavender. She sat on the wharf late one afternoon, dangling her bare legs over its edge, and watched the sails and the circling seagulls and everything within sight and waited for Mart and Lavender to join her as they had agreed. Lavender was running an errand for Cap'n Hawkes and Mart had gone to Commercial Street for some candy.

It was too early in the day for the fishermen to come in. Sidney knew that. For that reason a dory approaching Rockman's caught her eye. In it were two men, in oilskins and rubber boots. As it came near to the wharf a thickset fellow stepped out from the shed. Sidney had never noticed him before. And her eyes grew round as she observed that in place of one hand he wore an iron hook. Like a flash there came to her a confused memory of stories she had read of high piracy and buccaneers. She looked

at the ugly hook and at the man and then at the approaching dory and every pulse quickened and tingled. Without moving a muscle she leapt to attention.

Partly concealed as she was by the pile of old canvas the man did not see her. Nor did the two in the dory notice her. As the dory bumped its nose against the wharf one of the men threw a line to the man on the dock who caught it dexterously with the iron hook. He had evidently been waiting for the dory. Then one of the two in the boat sprang to the wharf while the other busied himself in shutting off the engine.

"'Lo, Jed. Good catch?"

"Yep. Good catch."

Not unusual words for Rockman's wharf but they rang with strange significance to Sidney, athirst for adventure. Why, there were not any fish in the dory! And the man with the hook had called the other Jed! Jed Starrow! *It was Jed Starrow.* She peeked cautiously around the old sails. Jed Starrow was tall and very dark and had just the right swagger. If he had worn a gay 'kerchief knotted about his head, earrings, and a cutlass in his sash he would have been the pirate true; as it was easy for Sidney to see him like that in spite of his commonplace oilskins and his cap.

The two men walked slowly up the wharf, Jed Starrow a little in advance of the other. The man in

the dory, having shut off the engine, lounged in the bow of the boat and lighted a pipe.

Sidney sat very still until Jed Starrow and his companion were out of sight. Then she climbed to her feet, slipped along the side of the shed and ran up the wharf until she could jump down on the beach. Here she waited Mart's return.

Mart and Lavender came almost at the same moment, Mart with a bulging bag of assorted and dreadful-hued candies. Mysteriously Sidney beckoned to them to join her in the seclusion of the beach.

"Whatever's happened?" mumbled Mart her mouth full of candy. "You act like you were struck silly."

"I've found something out!" Sidney spoke in a sepulchral whisper though their voices could not have been heard by anyone on the wharf. "Lav, *who is Jed Starrow!*"

Lav stared at her in wonder.

"Why—why—he's Jed Starrow. That's all. Fellow 'round town. Owns the *Puritan,* that new schooner."

"I believe—" Sidney spoke slowly. "I believe Jed Starrow is a—pirate!"

At this Lav and Mart broke into loud laughter. But Sidney stood her ground, not even flushing under their derision.

"You can laugh. But I know—I know—instinctively. I sometimes do know things like that. I

guess it's an occult power I have. And, anyway, Cap'n Davies hinted as much."

"Oh, Cap'n Davies—he's always snoopin' round for trouble. We have plenty of rum-runners and I guess lots of things get smuggled—but *pirates*—"

"Captain Davies distinctly *said* pirates—" insisted Sidney who had not sufficient experience to properly classify rum-runners and smugglers. Anyway, pirates sounded more exciting.

"What's started all this?" asked Lavender.

Sidney told of the landing of the dory and the man with the iron hook for a hand.

"Oh, that's only Joe Josephs. He's a wrecker."

Mart was catching something of Sidney's spirit; in truth Mart was unconsciously catching a great deal from Sidney these days.

"Well, he's certainly doing something *besides* wrecking. It's been an awful poor season for wrecks and gran'ma says Joe Josephs' wife's been to her sister's at Plymouth and got a new coat and hat for the trip and she hasn't had a new thing since Letty Vine give her her blue serge dress and that wasn't new."

"You see—" cried Sidney, exulting, "Joe Josephs has divided the spoils!"

"Oh, you girls are crazy! Why everyone in the town knows Jed Starrow. Don't you think everyone 'ud know if he was a pirate? He's lived here ever since he was born, I guess,"

"But, Lav, it was so *funny* for them to say just alike "good catch" when they didn't have any fish at all! It was a password. Pirates always have passwords."

"Prob'bly a code," jeered Lav, rocking with laughter. "You watch the sky anights; mebbe they use rockets to signal one another, too."

Sidney was still sufficiently stirred by the whole incident as to be able to tolerate Lav's stupidity.

"Of course I know pirates—even these days—wouldn't use rockets and codes. I'm not as ignorant as all *that*. And I *am* going to watch, day and night. It'll be easy for me to watch 'cause I'm a girl and no one will suspect what's in my head."

"I should say they wouldn't! Gee!" and Lav permitted himself a last long laugh.

"And you may change your tune yet," cried Sidney, really vexed, "When Mart and I discover something."

"We'll both keep our eyes open!" Mart agreed, admiring Sidney's imagination even though she could not always follow it. "But we ought to keep quiet 'bout our suspicions, hadn't we?"

Sidney hesitated. She *did* want to tell Mr. Dugald about the "good catch." But Mart went on convincingly.

"If we told anyone we were on, y'see it might get to Jed Starrow himself."

"That'd be the biggest joke in town," Lav warned, with a chuckle.

Sidney ignored him. "Of course we must not breathe a word of our suspicions to a soul," she averred. "And if either of us finds out anything she must tell the other at once. I think we *will* find something, too, for two heads are better than one."

"Say, are you going to leave me out of your fun—just 'cause I laughed?"

Sidney did not want to leave Lavender out but she did want to punish him a little. She pretended to consider his question.

"If you find it all so highly amusing you might be tempted to tell someone—"

"What'ya mean? That I'd squeal on you? If you think *that,* well, I don't want to be in on it—"

"Oh, Lav, of course I know you wouldn't squeal," cried Sidney, relenting. "And we *will* need you to help find things out. Oughtn't we to have some sign or a word or something to sort of signal that one of us knows something to tell the others? What'll it be—"

Mart scowled down at the sand. For the moment she was possessed with an envy for Sidney's agile imagination, a disgust at her own stolid faculties. Why couldn't *she* think of things right offhand the way Sidney could?

But it was Lavender who suggested the "signal."

"Hook!" he offered and Sidney clapped her hands in delight.

"Oh, grand! No one would ever guess. And it sounds so shivery! Why, that man with the iron hook just *has* to be a pirate!" Then she suddenly grew embarrassed by her own enthusiasm. "It's different with you two," she explained, "you've lived here all your lives and you don't know what it's like to have to be a po—" She broke off, startled. One breath more and she would have revealed the truth to Lavender and Mart. "Middletown is the pokiest town—there's nothing exciting ever happens there."

"I don't know as much exciting happens here. I s'pose enough happens, only you have to have something inside you that makes you *think* it exciting, I guess." Which was Mart's initial step into any analysis of emotion, but not her last.

Lavender turned toward the wharf. "I got to go and hunt up Cap'n Hawkes," he announced regretfully. "So it'll be "hook," will it? Well, I swear from henceforth I'll watch every citizen of Provincetown to see if he has a cutlass at his belt or a tattoo on his chest. Come on, girls—sleuths, I mean—"

"I do hope," sighed Sidney as she and Mart wandered homeward over the hard sand, "that one of us'll have to say "hook" soon. Don't you?"

But in her heart Sidney had an annoying con-

viction that neither Mart nor Lav took her pirate suspicions quite as seriously as she did. At supper Lav deliberately kept the conversation on Jed Starrow and his activities with a disconcerting twinkle in his eyes. Mart assumed the same lofty tolerance of their secret game as she showed to their play on the *Arabella*—as though it were a sort of second-best fun.

"Well, I don't care," Sidney declared stoutly. To think of Jed Starrow as a wicked buccaneer and Joe Josephs, the wrecker, as his accomplice in piracy, satisfied her craving for adventure. For the next many days she let it color everything she saw, every word she overheard; the connecting links she forged from her own active imagination.

CHAPTER XIV

WORDS THAT SING

To seal their pact of palship Lavender took Sidney to Top Notch.

He led her over a little path that wound around the smaller sand dunes directly behind Sunset Lane until they came to a clump of old willows. Once a cottage had stood under the willows; its timbers and crumbling bricks still lay about half buried in the sand and covered over with moss and climbing weeds. Though not a quarter of a mile from Aunt 'Achsa's the spot offered as complete solitude as though it had been at the ends of the world. The only sounds that reached its quiet were the far-off screaming of the seagulls as they fought for their food at low tide, and the distant boom-boom of the surging sea on the beach of the backside.

"Look up there!" commanded Lavender proudly. And Sidney, looking as he had bidden her, gave a little cry of delight. For there among the great limbs of the biggest of the willows was a tiny house.

"That's mine. Top Notch. Mr. Dugald built it. That's where I study."

"Why, it's the cutest thing I ever *saw*!" Sidney was already at the bottom of the narrow ladder that led to the house. "Can I go up? I feel just like

Alice in Wonderland, as though I'd have to take a pill to get small enough to squeeze in."

"Oh, no, you won't. It's big enough for two."

The structure had been cleverly contrived; plankings securely nailed to the spreading branches gave indeed ample space for two and even more; there were comfortable seats and wide unshuttered windows, a rough table and a secret shelf that looked like part of the wall until one unlocked and let down a little door and revealed a neat row of books. A "wing" of the house, added to another branch, Sidney declared, was "upstairs."

Sidney sat down on one of the seats and Lavender sat on the other.

"Why, this is the best *yet!*" Sidney cried with a long breath. "I don't see how Mr. Dugald thinks of the nice things he does."

"He's the best sort that ever lived." Lavender asserted with a little break in his voice. "I don't know why he bothers 'bout me. But he found out that I came over here and sort o' camped among those ruins down there and I used to hide my things in that old oven so's Aunt Achsa wouldn't find them. He knew why, too. Y'see it bothers Aunt Achsa a lot to have me want to read and study so much—she's afraid I'll get to thinkin' of going away. She don't know, y'see, that I *am* going, some day. So then Mr. Dugald helped me build Top Notch. There are all my books."

Sidney ran her eye over the different volumes; among them were stories of seafaring adventure and books on travel and science, a dictionary, a Bible—and a volume of Browning's poetry. Sidney's hand shot out toward this last, then quickly dropped to her side.

Lavender saw the gesture. "I like poetry," be explained shyly. "I'm kinda afraid of it—I mean I don't understand it and I wish I did. Mr. Dugald says he don't, either. But there's something about the way poetry goes that's like music—it makes a sound. It's like the ocean, moving and beating, and kind o' like your heart. And sometimes the words hurt, they're so beautiful. I wish I knew more about poetry."

Sidney felt shivery cold all over and hot at the same moment. She kept her eyes on the square that was the open window. She knew she ought to tell the truth to Lavender—right now. But, oh, she *couldn't*. Yet she must! She had almost summoned the right words to begin when Lavender rose and stepped toward the ladder.

"I brought you here so's you'd know 'bout it and use it when you want to—the books'n everythin'. Only don't let Mart come. She'd make fun of it. Here's where I hide the key to the shelf. S'long. I got to get down to Rockman's." Lavender abruptly slipped down the ladder and ran out of sight among the dunes.

Left alone in the Top Notch Sidney felt a guilty remorse sweep over her. Lavender had shared with her his sanctum sanctorum, he had admitted his love of poetry and she had sat silent and had not told him the truth.

"Like music—like the waves of the ocean beating—like one's heart—words that hurt," his shy sentences rang in her ears. Probably he had found it hard to tell her for fear she might laugh. Laugh—why, suddenly she knew that that was really the way poetry seemed to her! She just *made* herself believe she hated it when she did not hate it at all. Music—she could hear Isolde's soft drawling voice reading from one of father's books and it was indeed music. She had all that treasure that she could share with Lavender, hungry for the beautiful, and yet she had sat mum. Oh, she had been horrid, stingy. And he was sharing Top Notch with her.

Quite naturally Sidney, brooding secretly over her shortcomings, fell back upon the long-neglected "Dorothea." And she took "Dorothea" at once to Top Notch, the better to pour out her feelings undisturbed. She covered a whole page with her appreciation of Lavender's confidence and her utter unworthiness of such tribute. Then the fascination of Top Notch brought her to Mr. Dugald.

"I wish the girls knew him. He's so much nicer than any of their suitors, than even any of Vick's." Let it be recorded here that Sidney paused and chewed

her pencil and pondered the difficulties of bringing about an acquaintance between Mr. Dugald and any one of her three sisters. Romance was never far from Sidney's imaginings; she invariably endowed every young man who came to the Romley house for any sort of a reason with deep purposes of wooing. But this situation offered obstacles to even Sidney's imagination for miles separated Mr. Dugald from the charms of her sisters; there seemed no way in which he could meet them.

However, obstacles only stimulated Sidney. "I know," she wrote furiously, "I'll pick out one of them and talk about her all the time and wish and wish in my heart and just *make* something happen. Now, which one, dear Dorothea, is the important thing for me to decide."

From point of romance Vick offered the most possibilities—there was so much about Vick to talk about. But Mr. Dugald did not seem Vick's sort. Vick liked what she called "smooth" men and Mr. Dugald was most certainly not that. And, anyway, Vick would simply have to have a rich man to give her all the things she said she intended having and Mr. Dugald was not rich or he'd have more fashionable clothes. No, Vick was out of it. Isolde—well, he wasn't Issy's sort, either. Sidney did not know just what Issy's sort was like but she did not think it was like Mr. Dugald. Anyway, she did not *want* Issy to have him. She wanted Trude to have

him, dear old peachy Trude who had never had any beau except her Lost Love.

"I shall talk about dear Trude and all her nice points. I shall even say she is beautiful for she is in the eyes of love and I like to talk about Trude, anyway. So from this day forth I shall gather the threads of Destiny into my white hands and weave a beautiful pattern of love and happiness."

Forthwith Sidney began her weaving and found it amazingly easy. She talked through supper about Trude and took it as a promising sign that Mr. Dugald himself asked her all sorts of questions as though he "thirsted" to know more. And Sidney answered generously. She walked with him after supper to the postoffice in order to talk more about Trude. The next day she produced a very unflattering snapshot of Trude and left it on the kitchen table and later gloated in secret over its disappearance, though of course Aunt Achsa *might* have burned it up in her tireless cleaning and straightening.

After that Trude's name crossed the conversation of the little family frequently and quite naturally. Mr. Dugald called her "Truda" and knew that she was staying with the Whites on Long Island and that she was the prop of the entire Romley family and never thought of herself at all and that she wasn't as pretty as Vick or Isolde but really, *nicer*—Sidney quite opened her heart. And then one morning when she was helping Mr. Dugald clean his

brushes she told him of Trude's Lost Love. Not much about it for the reason that she herself knew only a little and also because a strange look went suddenly over Mr. Dugald's face.

"Put on the brakes, little sister. Aren't you letting me into secrets that perhaps your Trude would not want me to know?"

Sidney's face flamed. She knew Mr. Dugald was right. "Oh, I *should* not have told you. I—just got started and didn't think. Can't you forget what I said as though I didn't say it?" she pleaded.

"I'll forget what you said," Mr. Dugald promised, knowing perfectly well that he could not and from that day on he never asked any more questions of Sidney concerning her family.

"I'm not playing fair," he said to himself but not to her.

To "Dorothea" Sidney confided her chagrin. "I didn't say *much*—just that Trude had had one heart-breaking affair with a man she met at Mrs. White's and that I didn't believe she'd gotten over it yet. I read a book once where it said pity was akin to love and I thought if Mr. Dugald *knew* that Trude's heart was broken he would feel very sorry for her. But he looked so embarrassed that I knew I had not been maidenly as Isolde would say and I blushed furiously. He promised to forget it and I think he will. But, oh, perhaps I have defeated my dear purpose for now when I speak of Trude he

looks funny as though he was afraid of what I was going to say next. I am in despair."

The sound of voices, one unmistakably Mr. Dugald's, disturbed Sidney's musings. She thrust "Dorothea" into the secret shelf and locked it. Then she peeped out of the window.

Mr. Dugald and Miss Letty Vine approached down the narrow path of hard sand straight toward the willows. Sidney's first impulse was to call to them; in the next moment she realized that they had no intention of climbing to Top Notch. Miss Vine wore heavy gloves on her hands and carried a trowel and a basket and was making little jumps here and there among the weeds in search of "specimens."

Sidney sat very still and watched her. She thought Miss Letty the most interesting person, anyway. She always looked like the figurehead of a ship come to life, as Mr. Dugald had described her. She was very tall and bony, with huge bones that made lumps in her shoulders and elbows and even at her knees; her temples protruded and her cheek-bones and her jaw. She had long fingers with prominent knuckles.

Miss Letty always wore a style of dress that she had evolved for herself long ago and that was plainly built for comfort rather than style or beauty. She held any grace of trimming as "froppery" and scorned it, going always unadorned. She wore her "learning" just as she wore her clothes. That she had gone to school in Boston and studied music there no

one would ever know from anything she said. One just thought of Miss Letty as being *born* with knowledge, the way she was born capable. "Capable from the cradle," Aunt Achsa sometimes said.

Everyone liked Miss Letty in spite of the bones and the sharp tongue and the freakish dresses, and no one knew exactly why; it might have been her eyes which were kindly and had little twinkles deepset within their irises, or her way of knowing the thing to do and going ahead and doing it. Everyone respected Miss Letty and acknowledged her worth at once.

Now Mr. Dugald was lounging against one of the rotting timbers of the house-that-had-been and sketching Miss Letty on the pad which he always carried in the pocket of his old coat. *He* thought Miss Letty most interesting, too. He spent considerable time at her house and often took long walks with her.

While Sidney watched, Miss Letty sat down stiffly by Mr. Dugald's side and looked with interest at the sketch.

"That's about the thousandth one you've made, isn't it? And you can't seem to get any of them bad enough."

"I can't get into it what I want," Dugald Allan laughed, tearing off the sheet and crumpling it in his hand. "You see I feel something about you that I haven't been able yet to put on canvas. But

I will some day. Then I'll know I have gotten somewhere."

Miss Letty considered his words as though they were of some one quite apart from herself.

"I suppose it's my soul you're hoping to catch. Well, I never did wear it on my sleeve," and she laughed, a great laugh like a man's.

"No, you do not. That's true. But it's my job to get at people's souls, wherever they wear 'em, and paint them in."

"Well, hunt, then. Souls are queer things," opined Miss Letty, carefully drawing off her old gloves and smoothing them out with her long, bony fingers. "I sometimes think the Lord gets the souls mixed up and puts them in the wrong bodies. Maybe that's wicked but if 'tis I think lots wickeder things."

"Maybe He knows more about it than we think He does—" said Dugald so softly that Sidney, frankly eavesdropping, had hard work to catch the words. They were so interesting, these two, that she was glad she had not let them know she was in Top Notch; she hoped they would talk a long time about souls and such things. But without warning Miss Letty changed the subject.

"Did you ever know such a smart piece as that girl of Achsy Green's?"

"Sidney?" And Mr. Dugald chuckled. "She's sure one rare kid. I don't know when I've enjoyed anything as much as having her around. And do you

know the youngster's rarely gifted—she has a colorful imagination and a perception of verities that may take her further than her father. She is fighting destiny just now, but it will get her; if she isn't a poet she'll be a creator of something equally fine."

"I'm too old to live to know—but you will," answered Miss Letty, quite calmly. "And maybe we're both wrong. Maybe her finest work will be to raise a family. And I don't know, when all's said and done, but that's as good a job as your daubs or my music or a book of verse. You've got something then that can love you back."

But Sidney did not hear this simple philosophy for she had dropped to the floor of Top Notch and covered her ears with her hands. Her face flamed with the anger that held her. How *dared* they sit there and talk her over! And say that she was going to write poetry! That she had something or other and might be greater than her father! A poet! Well, she *wouldn't! She would not!* She thought, with stinging humiliation, of the verses she had written in her attic den and that lay now hidden in the secret place under the floor. She'd written them just because they hummed so in her ears that she had *had* to write them, but when she returned home she'd tear them into tiny bits and never, *never* write another line, even though the words did jingle and hum.

She sat cramped on the floor of Top Notch, until she was certain the intruders had gone away. Then

she got stiffly to her feet and reached for "Dorothea." Hot tears of mortification blinded her eyes so that she had to dash them away with the back of her hand. One splashed upon the page she had opened.

"I have come, dear Dorothea, to another cross-road in life. You only shall witness my solemn vow. *I shall not be a poet!* I shall be a missionary. A missionary's life is fraught with danger and takes them to distant climes and they have to dress in what is given to them out of a barrel—"

She felt a little better and pleasantly sacrificial after she had written this vow. Poor Sidney, she did not know that the words that Lavender had likened to music and the beating sea would sing in her ears as persistently in Timbuctoo as in the quiet of her attic den!

CHAPTER XV

CAP'N PHIN

WHAT made life at Sunset Lane so delightful to Sidney was that she never knew from one day to the next what she was going to do. Back at Middletown everything was always arranged ahead —they did this on Tuesday and this on Wednesday and always on Saturday there was the League. At Sunset Lane she did not even know when it was Tuesday or Thursday unless she stopped to think; jolly things happened as though they popped out of the blue ether.

Like that Miss Letty dropped in one evening after supper.

"Do you want to ride over to Wellfleet with me enough to be ready at six o'clock?" she asked Sidney very casually, as though it were nothing at all to suggest. Sidney had longed to ride with Miss Letty in the sideboard buggy behind King who, Mr. Dugald declared, had come off the Ark with Noah. And to go to Wellfleet, perhaps see her friend Cap'n Phin Davies!

"Can we call on Cap'n Davies?" she asked eagerly.

Miss Letty smiled. "I reckon I couldn't steer King away from Elizy Davies' house. I thought I'd

take you there and leave you while I give my lessons and then I'd ride 'round and have a visit with Elizy and Phin and maybe some of Elizy's gingerbread. Elizy and I went to school together."

The next morning Sidney was ready and on her way to Miss Letty's house before six o'clock. She had been far too excited to eat any of the breakfast Aunt Achsa had set out for her but Miss Letty, guessing this, made her sit down and eat a bit of toast and a boiled egg.

"It's a long way between here and Wellfleet and King's slower than he used to be."

Seated next to Miss Letty, jogging along through the misty morning, Sidney could not speak for pure rapture of delight. She had never ridden behind a horse in her life! She thought King a giant steed; with every swish of his long tail her heart skipped a beat, the move of his great muscles under his heavy flanks held her fascinated gaze. Miss Letty talked to him as though he were human and the animal understood and tossed his head. She said: "Now, King, we're going to Wellfleet and we got to get there before noon." And then she let the reins slacken and slip down between her knees as though she had no further care. One certainly could not do that with an automobile! Sidney did not wonder now that Miss Letty preferred King to a Ford.

She wished she dared ask Miss Letty how old King really was but she did not think it polite any-

more than if she asked Miss Letty how old she was. King was not handsome, he was bony like his mistress, but he certainly understood everything. Miss Letty said he knew they were going to Elizy Davies' by the way he loped ahead; King, too, had a strong liking for Elizy Davies' gingerbread.

"She feeds it to him in great hunks. And he won't eat anyone else's gingerbread, either. Scornful as you please even when I offer him some. Now I say that's discriminating for a horse. I suppose it's what folks call horse-sense."

Sidney did not know which she liked better, watching the gleaming marshes through which the highway wound or listening to Miss Letty's spasmodic conversation. Miss Letty pointed out old landmarks to Sidney, then told her something of the school at Truro to which she and Elizy Davies had gone, then of the little girls to whom she was about to give music lessons. She had taught their mothers. Then she lapsed into a deep silence broken only by an occasional "cl-lk" to King which she made with her tongue against her teeth and to which King paid no attention except for a flick of his right ear.

Sidney, looking down at the great bony hands limply holding the reins, thought it very funny to picture them on the keyboard of a piano. If she had spoken her thoughts aloud Miss Letty would have told her, quite calmly, that she couldn't play a note now, but that she knew when notes were played right

and she could still rap lagging fingers smartly across the knuckles. Folks would have her, anyway. Sidney did not know, of course, that Miss Letty was a tradition and that Cape Cod clings to its traditions.

"You'll think Phin Davies' house the queerest thing you ever saw. It isn't a house nor is it a boat; it's as much one as t'other and not anything, I'd say, but what two crazy men getting their heads together rigged up. Cap'n Davies said as long as he had to live ashore he wanted his house to look like a boat, he didn't care what folks said, and he hunted the Cape over to find a builder who wouldn't apply to have him locked up in an asylum, straight off. He got a man from Falmouth, who'd been a master once on a trader and sort of knew how Phin Davies felt. But there was Elizy carrying on awful about it and saying *she'd* always looked forward to the time when she could have a nice house—and there the two of them were. And the house is as 'tis. Phin has the front of it that's as like the bow of a ship without any rigging as they could make it, and Elizy has the back that's got as up-to-date a kitchen as any on Cape Cod."

A winding road, all sweet with wild primroses led up to the queer house on the eminence. Sure enough, there was the front part like the forward hull of a ship, deck-houses and all; and the back like any sensible New England home. Sidney giggled delightedly.

"But there aren't two finer people on this Cape!" declared Miss Letty. "And there's Phin coming to meet us. Reckon he spied King through his glasses along beyond Wellfleet."

Cap'n Phin Davies was overjoyed to see Sidney. "Why, it's the little gal I found on the train!" he repeated over and over. "Elizy," he called lustily toward the kitchen door, "come and see! It's the little gal I told you 'bout that I found on the train."

Elizy Davies came hurrying from the kitchen door. She was lean to gauntness and tall and wore round, steel-rimmed glasses low on the sharp bridge of her nose. Sidney immediately understood how she had been able to hold out for her half of the house. But she greeted Sidney with kindly interest and Miss Letty with real affection.

"I thought you'd be over this way today. Anne Matthews said Maida was going to have a lesson. Got my gingerbread all mixed."

Miss Letty had not gotten out of the buggy. She turned King's head.

"Thought I'd leave Sidney here while I gave my lessons," she explained briefly and then clucked to King.

Mrs. Davies took Sidney into her part of the house. It was cool and dark and sweet-smelling and very, very neat. Sidney sat down in a stiff rocker and answered Mrs. Davies' questions concerning

her Aunt Achsa and Lavender, while Cap'n Davies stumped restlessly about.

"Now I cal'late you've heard enough, Elizy, and I'm goin' to carry my little shipmate off and show her *my* part o' the old hull."

Eliza accepted his suggestion with a smile and admitted that she had to finish up her work. Immensely relieved Sidney followed Cap'n Davies. With the enthusiasm of a boy he took her to the front rooms of the house and showed her his treasured possessions. There was not a corner of the globe that had not contributed something to his collection of mementoes. And each meant to the old seafarer, not its own intrinsic value, but a certain voyage. "I got that when we took a cargo to Shanghai. Roughest v'yage I ever ran into," and "I picked that up when we had to lay to at Buenos Aires 'cause every man jack in the fo'castle had small-pox," or "found that when Elizy shipped with me on the old *Amanda L. Downs*. Forget just where—" and so on.

In the cupola on the roof that Cap'n Davies called his lookout and where he spent most of his time, he had put the paraphernalia from the *Viking,* his last boat. He had rigged up a bunk so that he could even sleep there when he fancied. He explained that he never let Elizy "tidy up." "When I get a notion I fix things shipshape myself, but I ain't had a notion now in sometime." Sidney could see that.

Yet the littered room had an individuality that Elizy's own spotless quarters lacked.

"Now set down on that bunk and let me have a look at you," the Cap'n commanded, seating himself in an old swivel chair that creaked and trembled under his weight. "'Pears to me you've picked up quite a bit!" He smiled his approval and nodded his great head. "Yes, they ain't starvin' you and I'd say you'd been runnin' in the sun and there ain't anything that can beat our Cape sun for bringin' out roses on bushes and little gal's cheeks." He beamed with satisfaction over his long speech. "Now, tell me, how's the pirates? Seen any?"

His question came so suddenly that Sidney started. She hesitated, then answered slowly. "Yes, I have."

"Well, I'll be dumblasted!" exclaimed the captain, plainly astonished by her answer. He had spoken only in pleasant chaff and had not thought Sidney would take him seriously.

"At least—" Sidney amended, "I *think* I've seen some. I told Lavender and Mart they're pirates or—or something, and we're going to watch every move Jed Starrow makes, at least every chance we get—"

The jovial expression suddenly left the Captain's genial face and a heavy frown furrowed the leathery forehead.

"Jed Starrow! Now what in thunder would make you set on Jed Starrow—"

His frown alarmed Sidney. Perhaps she had made a dreadful mistake in divulging their suspicions of Jed Starrow, suspicions which really Lavender and Mart did not share, except as it helped their fun along—

"Oh, I shouldn't have said that it's Jed Starrow we suspect. I heard Mr. Starrow and that—that man with the hook—say something that sounded mysterious and I told the others, Mart and Lav, about it and we're just pretending that we *think* they're pirates! It's something to do and makes it exciting when we're down on the wharves. And they *do* look like pirates—especially the wrecker man. But I ought not to have said their names—as long as it's only a sort of game we're playing, ought I? You won't tell anyone, will you?"

Cap'n Davies promised hastily and took Sidney off to see the new heifer calf, just a week old. In the delight of fondling the pretty little creature Sidney forgot her embarrassing break. She did not notice that the Captain seemed deeply absorbed by some thought and that when he was not talking he still frowned.

After she had visited the Cove and watched the waves dash against the Head and explored the boat-house Miss Letty arrived with King and Mrs. Davies summoned them to dinner. They ate dinner in the

big kitchen that stretched from one side of the house to the other so that a breeze, all tangy with salt, stirred the heat of the room. Mrs. Eliza and Miss Letty talked and Sidney ate and laughed as Cap'n Phin surreptitiously, and with sly winks at her, fed the old Maltese cat under the table. There were fried chicken and peas and mashed potatoes and the gingerbread and cocoa and flaky cherry pie. And after dinner they all went out to watch King eat the gingerbread of his choice.

Sidney and Miss Letty helped Mrs. Elizy clear up and then they joined Cap'n Phin under the shade of the trees on the Head from where they could see far out over the bay. Sidney stretched on the grass and listened while the others talked, determining to put down every word they said in "Dorothea" so that she could read it over when she was a very old woman. She loved the way Miss Letty answered back to Cap'n Davies when he teased her and she was not the least bit afraid of Mrs. Davies, now. All in all, though it was a very quiet afternoon, it was one Sidney long remembered.

When Miss Letty announced that they'd "have to be starting for home." Cap'n Davies recollected that there was something in the lookout he wanted to show Sidney and had forgotten. But when they reached the lookout it appeared that he had forgotten again for he sat down in the swivel chair and faced her.

"Looky here," he commanded in a voice Sidney had not heard before in their brief acquaintance, "don't know as it's any o' my affair but I want you to keep off the wharves after dark. Off the beach, too. Play your games in daylight. Things are shapin' to a sort o' head and there may be mischief anytime and you'd best be at home come dark. If you don't promise me I'll speak a word to Achsy Green—"

"Oh, I'll promise," cried Sidney anxiously. A warning to Aunt Achsa would most likely curtail their precious freedom. But she could not resist the temptation of questioning. "What mischief?" she asked, eagerly.

Cap'n Davies hesitated. Then he drew a letter from his pocket and tapped it with his finger.

"That's from the Custom House in Boston. Come last week. They're sending secret service men down to comb the Cape. Been huntin' the hul coast for a year and a half and they sort o' suspicion these parts because a lot of 'em was shipped into Boston that—"

"Oh, *what!* You haven't said *what*—" broke in Sidney, aquiver.

"So I didn't. I'm sailin' stern first, I cal'late. Well, there's always smuggling and smuggling and I guess there always will be, but when it comes to *diamonds* Uncle Sam sets up and takes notice. And they're suspicionin' that they're comin' in somewheres

along the Cape, and this part of the Cape, too. And *this*—" he shook another sheet in Sidney's face, " this is a notice of a reward offered by Wellfleet and Truro counties for findin' the dog that's givin' this part of the Cape a bad name! Five thousand dollars. In two weeks it'll be stuck on every post hereabouts 's far as Provincetown. And Phin Davies ain't goin' to lay to 'till I've found out whether it's someone on the Cape that's doing it or not. Cape Cod's brung up a race of honest men who could sleep with their doors wide open and if anybody is hurtin' the good name of the Cape I want to know it. 'Taint the money I want."

Sidney was scarcely drawing a breath for excitement. The Captain, suddenly subsiding, observed her tenseness. He laughed embarrassedly.

" Now there I go spillin' everything *I* know like a ship that's sprung a leak. I'll have to ask you to keep mum 'bout what I've told you, mate, and remember your word to keep off the beach come night. Ain't no place for a gal like you." And without another word he rose and led Sidney down the narrow stairs.

On the homeward ride Miss Letty found Sidney an abstracted companion. After a few attempts to keep up conversation she subsided into silence herself. " It's good to find a young one who can keep her tongue still a spell and enjoy her own thoughts."

But Sidney was not enjoying her thoughts, not

at all. With the realization that she could not share with Mart and Lavender the astounding revelations Cap'n Phin Davies had made all joy in them had fled. Had not she and Mart and Lavender agreed solemnly to tell one another anything any one of them discovered? It would be so perfectly thrilling to greet them the instant she reached home with "Hook!" They would be so surprised. They wouldn't laugh if she told them what she knew! But she couldn't.

Cap'n Phin Davies had said: "I'll have to ask you to keep mum" and that was quite enough to seal Sidney's lips.

CHAPTER XVI

POLA

For the next few days Mart and Lav found Sidney strangely quiet. Sidney on her part wondered if they could not tell, simply by looking at her, that her uncomfortable heart carried a great secret. Then something happened that put pirates and secrets completely out of her mind, something so amazing, so unexpected, as to turn her world on its head. Pola came!

In her zeal to get out of each day all the joy that it offered Sidney had forgotten Pola, or at least she had tucked her idol into a far-back corner of her mind where it was fast gathering dust.

One morning Mart, racing over the sand of the beach, hailed her. "Sid! Sid! They want us to pose for them! That Craig woman and the others!"

Sid gasped, unbelieving. The girls had often wished they might pose for some of the artists. Mart, having caught up with her, clutched her arm and hauled her hurriedly forward toward where little groups of artists were gathering on the beach in the shadow of one of the long wharves.

"But—but—" Sidney protested breathlessly. It would be fun to pose, of course, but not dressed as she was at that moment! Vick, in the picture that

had been hung in Paris, had worn a black velvet dress which the artist had borrowed for her sitting; she could run home and don the precious cherry crêpe de chine that she had not worn since she had come to Sunset Lane.

"Miss Craig said to get that—other—girl—" Mart was explaining as they ran. "And they're waiting."

Miss Craig, a pretty, earnest-eyed woman who was studying in one of the summer art classes, came forward to meet them. Her glance went over Sidney's figure with enthusiastic approval.

"You found her! How nice. Miss Higgins will pose you—"

"Can't I go home and change my dress? I have an awfully pretty—"

But Miss Craig cut Sidney's appeal short.

"*Gracious* no! Why, that would *spoil* you! We want you exactly as you are this moment—both of you. You're—you're *precious!*"

Sidney resented her "precious." She resented other remarks that came to their ears as Miss Higgins, who had charge of the little group, posed them against an old, overturned dory. "A perfect type—native—girls——freedom——wild beauty——" She resented the rotting dory. Vick had leaned against a crimson velvet chair. Why, her hair had not been combed since the morning before, her skirt was in tatters where she had torn it climbing into Top Notch;

she was horribly conscious of her long legs, bare, brown, and bruised.

Sidney found that posing in the morning sun on a beach at Provincetown was not the lark Vick had declared posing for the great Stuart Gelding had been. But then Vick had flirted a little with Stuart Gelding and had always had a cup of tea with him and his wife afterward; these art students appeared to have forgotten that their models were human with legs that ached from holding a position and arms that trembled with very eagerness to move. It was not one bit of fun.

Then, after an interminable time, Miss Craig called out cheerily; "There, that's enough for this morning," and came down to the dory, opening a little crocheted bag. From it she took two crisp one dollar bills. "Take this, girls, and divide it. And we are ever so grateful—you were splendid types. We'll have you again some day."

Sidney's hand had barely closed over her dollar bill when she spied a woman and a girl slowly walking along the wharf, watching with interest the artists who were still at work. The girl looked startlingly familiar to Sidney. She gave a little gasp and ran forward.

"*Pola!*" she called loudly.

The girl turned in astonishment at the sound of her name, stared for a moment, then quickly advanced laughing.

"Why, you're the Romley girl, aren't you? Of *all* the things! What are you doing here?"

"I'm visiting my aunt," explained Sidney, suddenly conscious of her appearance and in consequence painfully ill-at-ease.

"Oh, and do they hire you to pose? What fun! I suppose that's a sort of costume they make you wear, isn't it?"

"Y—yes," Sidney faltered, miserably. Pola's manner was prettily condescending and she made no move to join Sidney on the beach.

"I'm a wreck myself," Pola went on, airily surveying her trim and elegant person. "Mother and I are motoring. And I made her bring me down here to see my cousin. He's an artist and lives here summers. He'll just despise seeing us because he comes here to get rid of everything home. And the car's broken down and goodness knows how long we'll have to stay."

"Pola!" Her mother called sharply.

Pola waved her hand toward her mother. "Yes, mamma!" Then, to Sidney, "Isn't it simply rare our meeting like this? It shows how small the world is. I must run now! By-by!" She gave the slightest flip of her hand in sign of leave-taking and, turning, ran lightly up the wharf toward her mother.

Sidney's eyes followed her, devouring her dainty clothes, the tight-fitting motoring hat, the buckled pumps. Pola—the Pola she had carried enshrined in

her heart! That heart hurt now, to the core. She had dreamed of a meeting sometime, somewhere, had planned just what it would be like and what she'd say and what Pola would say. And now Pola had turned a shoulder upon it.

Mart's laugh behind her roused her.

"Who's Guinevere, anyway? Her ma called her just in time—we might a hurt the doll-baby!"

Sidney turned on Mart fiercely. "She's a friend of mine," she cried, in a voice she made rough to keep the tears from it. "And she's *not* a doll-baby."

"All right—go and play with her then—she's crazy about you, I guess." And with that Mart swung on her heel and stalked away, her head in the air.

Poor Sidney hurried back to Sunset Lane to hide her humiliation and her dismay. For some reason she could not understand she had offended Mart. And Pola had snubbed her. It had indeed been a cruel fate that had brought Pola out on the wharf at that precise moment!

She spent a lonely afternoon in Top Notch, too miserable to even pour out her heart to "Dorothea." Then she helped Aunt Achsa prepare supper and after supper, which was lonely, too, for neither Lavender nor Mr. Dugald were there, she insisted upon clearing up the dishes while Aunt Achsa went down to Tillie Higgins'.

Swishing her hands in the soapy water Sidney

pondered sadly the things she had longed to learn of Pola. Her name—why she hadn't even found out her name! What had her teacher said of that theme she had written on her visit to the Romley house? Where did Pola live? Of course she might see her again—Pola had said that they'd be in Provincetown for a few days, but she did not *want* to see her; she did not want Pola to see Sunset Lane and the little gray cottage and Aunt Achsa and Lavender. Pola would laugh at them and she would hate her!

At that moment footsteps crunched the gravel of the path and a shadow fell across the kitchen door. Sidney turned from the table. There stood Mr. Dugald and with him—Pola.

"I've brought my cousin, Sidney. She blew out to the Cape with that ill-wind we felt this morning. If you know what we can do with her I'll be your slave for life."

Playfully pushing Dugald Allan aside Pola walked into the kitchen.

"Isn't he horrid? You wouldn't dream that he's really crazy about me, would you? I told him how we'd met, even before this morning. He'd written home that Miss Green's cousin was here but I never dreamed it was you. I'm so sorry I didn't have a chance to introduce you to mother this morning. But mother wants me to take you back to the hotel. You can have a room right next to mine and we'll have

scads of fun— You'll come, won't you?" For Sidney's face was unyielding.

Like one cornered, Sidney stood straight against the table, her hands, red from the hot dish water, clasped tightly behind her back. Though she knew that Pola was trying to make amends for her rudeness of the morning, something within her heart turned hard. The dusty idol was crumbling to bits of clay.

"She's only inviting me because Mr. Dugald has told her to," she reasoned inwardly. And aloud she answered in a steady voice:

"I'm sorry, but I simply can't leave Aunt Achsa. You must come here and we'll find lots of jolly things to do—"

"Here?" laughed Pola, glancing around the old kitchen.

"Why not here?" roared Mr. Dugald. "As long as you've broken into our Secret Garden we'll introduce you to some things you've never done before in your life. Only Sid will have to find some suitable clothes for you, and you'd better leave your complexion on the dressing table."

Pola accepted his banter good-naturedly. "I shall be deeply grateful, old dear, if you *will* introduce me to any sensations I have not experienced before. There, now, will that hold you for awhile?" She turned to Sidney. "We quarrel like this all the time, but it's fun and I always have the last word.

I make him so mad he can't think of anything withering enough to say and I seize that strategic moment to cease firing. You see, I practice on Dug. I *will* come tomorrow if I may. Now, Duggie dear, lead me out of this funny lane or else I'll *never* find my way back to mamma. Goodby, Miss Romley."

Behind Pola's back Mr. Dugald cast such a despairing, apologetic and altogether furious look toward Sidney as to make Sidney suddenly laugh. And with her laugh all her sense of dismay and humiliation vanished. She forgot her red hands and the big gingham apron and the dishes spread about her in her amusement over Pola's pathetic attempt to be very grown-up and sophisticated. And *so* ill-bred! How ashamed Mr. Dugald had been of her!

Then a thought struck Sidney with such force that she sat down in the nearest chair. Why, if Mr. Dugald was Pola's own cousin, belonged to the grandeur that was Pola's, he would *never* be attracted by poor, plain Trude. Her beautiful hopes were shattered! She felt distinctly aggrieved.

However, there was Vick. Sidney hated to give Mr. Dugald to Vick, who always got everything, yet it seemed the only thing to do if any of the sisters were to have him. Almost sadly she went to her room, opened her satchel and took from it a small framed photograph of Victoria, a photograph which, while it did not flatter Victoria, paid full justice to

her enticing beauty. Considering it, Sidney reflected on how lucky it was that at the last moment she had put the pictures of her sisters into her baggage. Then she carried it to the kitchen and stood it on the narrow mantel next to the clock where Mr. Dugald's eyes must surely find it. Unlike the snapshot of Trude the picture remained there undisturbed.

CHAPTER XVII

PEACOCKS

EARLY the next day Pola appeared with Mr. Dugald in Sunset Lane in a simple garb that must have satisfied even her exacting cousin. Her mood was in accord with her attire as though she had left her sophistication behind with her silks and her rouge. She declared she felt as "peppy as they make them" and ready to do anything anyone suggested. And Mr. Dugald, resigned to wasting two weeks to entertaining his young cousin, of whom he was really very fond, promptly offered an astonishing assortment of suggestions from which he commanded the girls to choose.

"Why, you wouldn't believe there were so many things to do!" cried Pola with real enthusiasm. "Sidney, you'll have to decide." And Sidney at once decided upon a tramp to Peaked Hill on the ocean side with an early picnic supper.

In the days that followed, Sidney's first admiration for Pola returned. Though Pola would never again be the idol she was much more enjoyable as a chum. Her spirits, though an affectation, were infectious and gay; in her pretty clothes and with her pretty face she made Sidney think of a butterfly, a fragile, golden-winged, dainty flitting butterfly.

She professed to enjoy everything they did—even to the picnics. She tramped endlessly in her unsuitable shoes without a murmur of fatigue and Sidney suspected that she really *did* care a great deal for her cousin Dugald's approval.

With Mr. Dugald they motored to Highland Light and to Chatham. They toured the shops at Hyannis. They sailed with Captain Hawkes on the *Mabel T.* They rose very early one morning and went to the Coast Guard Station to watch the drill and then ate ham and eggs with Commander Nelson. More than once Sidney donned the cherry crêpe de chine and dined with Mrs. Allan and Pola and Dugald at the hotel, feeling very grand and traveled.

But to Sidney's deep regret Pola professed an abhorrence of swimming.

"Just please don't *ask* me," she had begged, shuddering. "I loathe it! It's one of my complexes. Of course I've gone swimming in almost every body of water on the globe, but I hate it. You'll spoil my fun *utterly* if you even try to make me!" After that Sidney could not urge. She did not know what complexes were, but Pola had made them sound real and convincing and a little delicate. Though Sidney missed the jolly swims with Lavender and Mart she refrained from even a hint of her feelings.

Often when they were together Pola waxed confidential over her cousin. "He's a thorn in Aunt Lucy's side," she explained one day as the girls

lounged in Pola's room at the hotel, a huge box of candy on a stool between them. "She always wants him to go in for society and to go abroad with her and do all the fashionable resorts on the Continent, but couldn't you *see* him? Not for Duggie boy, ever! When she starts planning something like that he bolts off somewhere and the next thing you hear is that he's painted a wonderful picture and sold it or had first mention or a gold medal. Of course that makes him terribly interesting and there are dozens of single ladies from forty to fourteen itching to catch him. And Dug's such a simple old dear that he doesn't know it. But his mother does and she has them all sorted over and the eligible ones ticketed. You see Dug will be dreadfully rich some day and goodness knows what he'll do with the money for he hasn't the brains of a child where business is concerned. His father's even richer than Dad."

Sidney literally blinked before the picture Pola drew—blinked and blushed that she had dared angle for Mr. Dugald herself like the forty-to-fourteen single ladies. Mr. Dugald belonged to a world that was foreign to the Romley girls, Pola's dazzling, peacock-world.

Sidney felt immensely flattered that Pola had taken her in among her peacocks. (Secretly, too, she considered that she carried herself well among them. She was most careful of her dress, now!) She did not know that Pola's sort instinctively seeks

out someone to dazzle, that Pola's generosity was a part of the dazzling process. She thought Pola wonderful to accept so casually her gilded privileges. Why, if Pola didn't like a dress or a hat or a pair of shoes she simply didn't wear it; she could buy anything she wanted from any one of the priceless bits of jewelry in the shops at Hyannis to the delectable sweets in the tea-rooms on Commercial Street. She could do just as she pleased—even more than Mart, for *she* never had to darn or mend or wipe dishes or dust or hang up her clothes or brush them. Realizing all this Sidney came to forgive that first condescension that had stung; she thought Pola little short of an angel to be so prettily friendly with them all.

So engrossed was Sidney in basking in Pola's favor that for a time she felt no compunctions at deserting Mart and Lavender; in fact she did not even think of them. Both Mart and Lavender had become suddenly very busy with affairs that kept them out of sight. If, once in awhile, Sidney wondered what they were doing something of Pola's or something Pola said quickly crowded the thought from her head. But one afternoon they encountered Mart as they strolled toward the Green Lantern to sit under its gay awnings and drink tea. Sidney introduced Mart to Pola and to cover Pola's rude stare she added quickly: "We're going down to the

Green Lantern, Mart. Won't you come with us?" conscious as she said it that her voice sounded stilted.

"No, thanks. I'm going to do something lots more exciting than sitting *there!* And I'm in a hurry, too." And with that Mart swung on past them, her head high.

Sidney had a moment's longing to run after her and coax her to come, but Pola's light giggle checked her. "Isn't she a riot? I'd have *died* if she'd come with us!"

"Oh, Pola—she'll hear you!" pleaded Sidney.

She hated herself because she did not tell Pola at once how bravely Mart shouldered her responsibilities, about gran'ma, who looked to Mart for everything. Instead she simply walked along with Pola and let Pola giggle. Pola, sensing Sidney's feelings, slipped her arm through hers and gave it an affectionate little squeeze.

"You're such a funny child," she said softly. "You'd be nice to anything. I can't, of course, for I go around to so many places and mother's warned me often about strangers. Anyway, it's lots nicer for just us two to be together, isn't it?"

But in spite of Pola's soft flattery and countless lumps of sugar the tea tasted bitter to Sidney and the Green Lantern, with its futurist awnings, its bizarre hangings and cushions, had no allure. The thought came suddenly to Sidney that it had been a whole week since she had even seen Mart; in that

time she had scarcely exchanged more than a half dozen words with Lavender.

To the tune of Pola's ceaseless chatter Sidney's thoughts kept darting back to that uncomfortable fact. Pola always talked of things she had done at home, abroad, at school, of her boy friends whom she called "men." She liked to hint of countless "affairs" which simply must not come to her mother's attention, assuring Sidney that she was absolutely the only one to whom she confided these deep intrigues. She had worn Guy Townsend's fraternity pin the whole winter before and not a soul had known whose pin it was for Guy was tabooed by mothers in general and Mrs. Allan in particular. Now Pola was simply crazy over a Jack Sicard who was playing the lead in "Hearts Aquiver." But not even Jack's manly beauty, as described by Pola, failed to draw from Sidney more than a mild: "He must be cute." Pola gave way to vexation.

"You're scarcely listening to me, Sidney Romley, when I'm telling you things I haven't told a *soul!* I believe you're still thinking of that ridiculous girl we met."

"She isn't ridiculous!" Sidney was prompt enough now in Mart's defense. "She looks funny, but you see I've gotten well acquainted with her and she's awfully nice."

"Oh, *nice,* of course! But *anyone* can be nice! You know perfectly well, Sidney, that there's as

much class in this country as there is in Europe and being *nice* does not break down social barriers."

Sidney had no answer ready for this. Curiously into her mind flashed what Mr. Dugald had said about the solid aristocracy. But somehow she knew Pola would not understand this. Pola went on:

"I'm a dreadful little snob, anyway. But I suppose that is the result of my education. It would be funny to go to the most expensive schools and have all the culture that Europe can offer and *not* be a snob."

Still Sidney stared into her teacup. She thought Pola was all wrong, but she did not know how to say it. Pola herself had told her that she had gone to Grace Hall because it had no examinations and graduated a girl anyway—so much for Pola's education. And culture—what benefited all the culture of Europe if Pola found enjoyment only in the company of youths her mother would not permit in the house?

Pola mistook Sidney's silence for hurt. "You goose, I'm not saying I think I'm any better than *you* are! But you must see that neither of us are a bit like that native girl!" Which admission Pola considered most generous.

"I wasn't thinking about whether you are any better than I am or not. I've been brought up, you see," with a rueful laugh, "to believe that my father being a poet set *me* a little apart from everyone else.

And I've hated it. What I was thinking was that there really isn't any class difference in people—except what we make ourselves, like the League building a barrier around me and you thinking you're in another class from Mart because you're rich. Maybe it isn't really the outside things that count, maybe it's the big things we have got or haven't got inside us—"

"Like what?" demanded Pola.

Sidney was thinking of Lav's self-effacing ambition to serve the world from the seclusion of a laboratory, of Mart's cheerfulness in the face of her lot and her loyal affection for her exacting and rheumatic grandmother; of the courage of Mart's grandfather, Ambrose Calkins, who had lost his own life in going back to his sinking schooner for the cook who could not swim; of her own ancestor, Priscilla Ellis. *Those* were the things which set people apart from their fellows, Sidney thought, but the understanding was too new in her own heart for her to find words in which she could tell Pola of it. "Like what?" Pola demanded again and this time her voice was a little haughty.

"Oh, I don't know," Sidney laughed. "I'm all mixed up. I guess I was trying to say something Mr. Dugald said once to me."

"Oh, *Dug!*" laughed Pola. "He's nutty about all that! Look at the way he lives here on the Cape. But mother says he'll get over it when he marries.

Now I have no intention of getting serious this grand day so let's have another piece of that chocolate fudge cake—it's on me, too, remember!" Which was Pola's pretty way of pretending she did not know that Sidney did not have any money with her. The dollar Sidney had earned for posing had long since been spent.

Sidney was relieved that Pola had rescued her from the "deep water." At the same time she suffered from the sense that she had not made Pola see Mart in another light. She had failed in loyalty. The sparkling blue of the bay that stretched before them only reminded her that this was the hour she usually went swimming. Due to Pola's "complex" she had not gone swimming for a whole week.

Even with her mouth full of the fudge cake, she vowed to herself that the very next day she would hunt out her chums and her old pastimes. Pola and Mr. Dugald must plan without her!

She had promised to dine again at the hotel with Pola and her mother but as soon as she could after dinner she returned to Sunset Lane. Because of her determination her heart was lighter. And her way was made easier, too, for Mrs. Allan had told Pola at dinner that the "Truxtons were at Chatham Bars." Pola had been as excited over the Truxtons as her mother.

"Can we go and see them right away?"

"Not tonight. But I have arranged for a car

and Shields will drive us over tomorrow. We can stay there for a few days. I shall welcome the change for this place has been very stupid for me, my dear."

"Poor mamma! I've been selfish. It'll be a lark seeing Cora Truxton again!" Pola had explained to Sidney: "We met the Truxtons at Nice. Cora and Millicent are both older, but they're the *cutest* girls. Will we go in the morning, mamma?"

Pola's manner had indicated that the coming of the Truxtons into their plans raised a barrier that now excluded Sidney. Throughout the dinner she had talked exclusively of the trip on the morrow and the renewing of that acquaintance that had begun in Nice. But Sidney felt nothing but a sense of escape.

She found Aunt Achsa alone in the cottage on Sunset Lane. She was sitting on the doorstep, "coolin' off." Sidney sat down beside her.

"Where's Lavender?" she asked, wishing Lavender was at home that she might begin her "making up" at once.

"Don't know. And I wish I did. Don't know what's gotten into that boy. I'm as worried as can be."

"About Lav? Oh, what's the matter?" For Aunt Achsa was close to tears. Something must have happened to break her habitual optimism.

"He's acted so queer like lately. Cal'late you'd of noticed it if you hadn't been off so much with Mr.

Dugald's folks. I thought it might a' been his stomach and I put a powder into his coffee, but he ain't been a mite different—"

"But what does he do, Aunt Achsa? He *looks* all right—"

Now Aunt Achsa hesitated. One tear separated itself from its fellows and rolled down her withered cheek and dropped upon her withered hand. She looked at it, startled, then lifted her hand and dashed it across her eyes.

"I swum, I'm cryin'. Don't know as I know when I've cried before. And cryin' before I have anything as I can see to cry for. But Sidney, I set such a lot on that boy—it's like I was his mother and his father and his brothers and his sisters all mixed up in one—gran'ma, too. He was such a little mite when I took him, y'see and then he's not like other boys and I've had to do a heap of lovin' to make up to him. I've prayed every day of my life for the Lord to keep him happy in spite of things and that was a pretty big prayer for I don't suppose the Lord wants us all to be happy all the time, that ain't His way of bringing us up. But I thought He might make an exception for Lav. Land sakes, how I go on —and you nigh to cryin' yourself." For she had caught Sidney blinking back something glistening from her own eyes.

"Aunt Achsa, Lavender is wonderful. He's talked to me a lot and he's going to be a great man

some day, I know. He has the grandest plans shut away in his heart and he *is* happy—"

Aunt Achsa looked at her, startled. "Plans—how *can* he when he's—" She bit off the words. Her lips trembled.

"Aunt Achsa, it doesn't matter what one's like on the outside!" Now Sidney floundered for the second time in one day under the pressure of her own thoughts. "I mean—Lav can do anything he wants to do, anyway. And he's working hard reading and studying and some day, after awhile, he'll go away somewhere and study more—"

"Sidney Romley, you're *crazy!*" cried Aunt Achsa, in a quavering voice. "Go away! How *can* he go away when we ain't even the money to go 'sfar as Orleans. And he ain't plannin' to go on anyone's *charity!*"

"Oh, I don't mean he's going away *soon!* I shouldn't have told anyway for Lav told me as a secret. But I thought maybe it would make you happier knowing he had great ambitions. And he'll tell you sometime himself."

When Aunt Achsa spoke it was in a thin, grieved voice.

"It's what I didn't want him to ever take into his head. Goin' off somewhere—alone. For I'm too old to go with him and he'll need me!"

"Oh I wouldn't have told you if I'd thought it would make you unhappy. He won't go for a long

time, Aunt Achsa. And when he does he'll come back real often."

Now Aunt Achsa sat so still that Sidney thought she had consoled her. But Aunt Achsa was facing in her own way this at which Sidney had hinted, drawing for it from that courage of hers that had not yet been exhausted. Well, if it was best for Lavender some day to go away she'd send him away with a smile even though the heart that had taken him, a wee baby, from the dying mother did burst with loneliness. Besides, even if Lavender went away she could go on praying to the Lord to keep him "happy"—no distance could keep her from doing that!

"It's like as not his plans in his head that's makin' him act so quiet like and short-spoken. And last night he didn't sleep in his bed at all!"

"Why, Aunt Achsa, where *was* he?" gasped Sidney, really startled.

"I don't know, dearie. He used to take to spells like that when he was little. But lately he's got over them. I followed him once and I found him out in the sand dunes lying flat on his face cryin' awful—out loud and beatin' his arms. I let him be. I stole home and I never let on I knew. When he came back all white lookin' I had a nice cake ready—roll jell, his favorite."

"Do—do you think he was out in the sand dunes—last night?"

"I don't know. He come in about nine o'clock, awful quiet and I didn't ask him anything, but I just set his breakfast before him as though the morning wa'n't half over. And then he went off again and I ain't seen him sense. I thought mebbe it was these folks of Mr. Dugald's—"

"What do you mean, Aunt Achsa?" But Sidney knew what she meant.

"Like as not Lav's plain jealous. Mr. Dugald hasn't had any time for anything but toting this Pola round everywhere and Lav notices it. He hasn't any right to be jealous as I can see for Miss Pola is Mr. Dugald's own cousin, but Lav thinks the sun rises and sets in Mr. Dugald. And like as not he misses you—"

"I've missed Lav dreadfully. I didn't know how much I missed him and Mart until today when it came over me suddenly that the things I was doing with Pola weren't really much fun—just at first they were because they were different. I'm afraid, Aunt Achsa, that I love different things! But tomorrow I am going to play all day long with Lav and Mart, see if I don't. I can't wait for tomorrow to come!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"HOOK!"

SIDNEY found it a little difficult to take up the fun with her erstwhile chums where she had left off. When she stopped at the Calkins' house directly after breakfast, Mart coolly declined to go anywhere with her, and smiled scornfully at her bare legs.

"I s'pose your million-dollar friend is otherwise engaged today!"

Sidney truthfully admitted that she was. "She's gone to Chatham with her mother to see some people they know. And I'm glad. I've been just dying for a good swim. Let's go out to the *Arabella* this morning."

But Mart declared she was tired of all that. In fact she was tired of doing lots of the silly things they'd been doing. She'd promised Gert Bartow to go there right after lunch.

Sidney had no choice but to go on alone in search of Lav. She was discouraged to the point of tears. Yet she knew in her heart that she deserved Mart's coldness. She remembered how she had felt once when Nancy had deserted her for a new girl at Miss Downs'. And it had seriously threatened their friendship.

As she wandered slowly toward the town Sidney

wondered what Mart and Gert Bartow were going to do. Gert Bartow was a girl of nineteen at least, and much more grown up than even that. Mart had pointed her out to Sidney. Sidney wished Mart had asked her to go with her to Gert's. She felt very lonely.

Perhaps she had spoiled everything. Pola would come back, of course, but, somehow, Pola's glamour had faded. After all, what, besides tons of candy and quarts of sweet mixtures and much glitter, had there been to it? The sweets and the glitter and Pola's endless confidences of "men" had left Sidney jaded and bored, though she did not know it; she did know that she was suddenly lonely for Mart and Lav and the stimulating pastimes they seemed to find always right at hand.

As she approached Rockman's, wandering there from force of habit, she saw Lav pushing off in a dory. She ran down the wharf, hailing him.

"Oh, Lav, take me with you!" she pleaded, breathlessly.

He hesitated a moment before he swung the dory back to the wharf. Something of the look Mart had given her flashed into his eyes.

Then: "Come on if y'want to," he answered ungraciously.

As she sat down in the bow of the boat Sidney wanted to cry more than anything else, but Lav's dark face suddenly reminded her of what Aunt Achsa

had told her. Perhaps he had been out in the sand dunes last night, lying on his face, sobbing aloud! She began chattering with resolute cheerfulness.

"Isn't it hot this morning, Lav? Where are you going?" Lav answered shortly that he was going out to the *Arabella.* Sidney noticed a book in his pocket, but said nothing. She ventured other remarks concerning the activities in the bay to which Lavender answered in monosyllables, if at all.

"Oh, look, the *Puritan's* in, Lav!" And even to this Lavender only grunted: "It's been in two days!"

By the time they reached the *Arabella* Sidney's remorse was yielding to a spark of indignation. Lav needn't be *quite* so mad for, after all, it had been his own precious Mr. Dugald who had thrown her and Pola so constantly together! And if Lav had not hidden himself away he most certainly would have been included in all the plans. It was not fair in Lav to act so cross.

"I know you came out to read, Lav, and I've some thinking to do, so I'm going up in the bow and leave you quite to yourself," Sidney said as they boarded the *Arabella,* and if in her tone there was something of Mart's tartness, it may be forgiven for Sidney had been punished enough.

"I don't care if you hang 'round," Lav conceded. "It's too hot to read, anyways. I thought maybe there'd be a breeze out here. What's that?" For

he had suddenly spied an object lying on the deck close to the rail as though it had dropped there from someone's pocket.

At almost the same moment Sidney spied it, too. Both darted for it. Lavender reached it first and picked it up and examined it with frowning eyes.

"It's a knife!" cried Sidney, at his elbow.

"Sure it's a knife. Anybody can see that. What I want to know—"

"Let me look at it. Isn't it Mr. Dugald's?"

"No, it isn't Mr. Dugald's. He hasn't been out here for a week. And that knife wasn't here yesterday for I'd a' seen it."

"Let me look at it, Lav," pleaded Sidney, for Lav, a curious expression on his face, had covered the knife with his hand.

"It's funny, that's all I got to say. I mean—how it come here."

"Lavender Green, show me that knife this minute! You act so mysterious and I have a right to know why."

Slowly Lavender placed the knife in Sidney's eager hands. It was an ordinary case knife such as the fishermen carried, but Lavender pointed to two initials that had been carved on the case.

"J. S."

"J. S." repeated Sidney; then she cried: "Why—J. S.! That's Jed Starrow!"

"Sure it's Jed Starrow!"

"But how did it get on the *Arabella?*"

"That's what I'd like to know."

"He's *been* on the *Arabella,* Lav!"

"Or someone of his gang."

"Isn't that *funny?* What would he come here for?"

Lavender was silent. And Sidney, staring at him as though to read from his face some explanation, suddenly fell silent, too. The secret that Cap'n Davies had laid upon her weighed heavily. She *wished* she could tell.

"Sid, I haven't played square," Lavender suddenly blurted out, flushing. "We promised to tell one another if any one of us found out anything and *I did*— and I didn't tell!"

Lavender's admission faded beside the fact that he knew something.

"Oh, what?" Sidney cried.

"I wasn't going to tell you. I thought you didn't care anything about the pirates any more. And the laugh's sort o' on me, anyway, because I thought we were all crazy to suspect Jed Starrow."

"Tell me quick, Lav," commanded Sidney, quivering with excitement.

Lav leaned against the rail. To tell his story meant confessing his state of mind.

"I guess I've been sore because you and Mr. Dugald fooled 'round with those new folks. Jealous. I get that way lots of times—all hot inside because

I'm different. And I go off somewhere alone and stay there until I fight it down."

"I know, Lav. Aunt Achsa told me. Did you go to the dunes?"

"One night I did. Stayed there all night. But one evening I went out on the breakwall. There's a place out there where the rocks are piled so's to make a cave. I used to play there a lot when I was a little kid. I crawled into it. And I hadn't been there very long when I heard somebody talking—two men. They were up close so's I heard everything they said."

"And what did they say, Lav? Oh, tell me quick!"

"I could only get scraps of it. I didn't dare look, I didn't dare move. But one fellow called the other Jed. I heard 'em say something about "risk" and a "stranger from Boston asking too many questions 'round Rockman's to be healthy," and Jed Starrow—I'm dead sure it was his voice—said, sort of blustering like, "Let them search the *Puritan!* They won't find anything on her *now!*" And the other fellow answered him: "There's too much in this, Jed, to take any chances." That's what they said, Sid, and then they went on."

"Oh, Lav, they're pirates!"

"Well, not exactly pirates, but they're up to *something* that's sure. Maybe they're rum-runners. There's a lot of that going on. I thought you were crazy, but I guess you weren't."

Sidney's lips trembled with eagerness. As long as Lavender knew what he knew she felt that she would be justified in telling him what Cap'n Davies had told her.

"It isn't rum—Lav," she whispered, "It's *diamonds!*"

"Diamonds! Oh, go on, where did you get that stuff?"

"It's diamonds, Lav." Then Sidney solemnly repeated what the old Captain had told her concerning the letter and the reward. "He asked me not to tell a soul, but you're different because you know. And he said that the reward would be posted everywhere in two weeks at least and it's that long now. Everyone will know soon."

"Sid, five thousand dollars!" Lavender whistled.

"If someone 'round here's doing it Cap'n Davies wants to catch him himself. He says he doesn't want the reward but he wants to punish the man who's hurting the honest name of this part of Cape Cod. I think that's a grand spirit."

Lavender's shoulders lifted. Why couldn't someone else save the fair name of Cape Cod—someone like a crippled boy whom most of the towns-people looked upon as a loafer?

"I'd like to catch 'em, myself," he said slowly in such a low voice that Sidney barely caught the words.

"Oh, Lav, why not? We have as good a chance

as anyone, knowing as much as we do. What'll we do first?" For Sidney was ready for adventure.

Suddenly Lavender realized that he was gripping the knife in his hand. He looked down at it.

"What we ought to do first is to find out how this knife got here. Let's put it where we found it and go back around the other side of that schooner so's no one on the *Puritan* 'll see us. Then we can come out late this afternoon and if it's gone—well, we'll know someone came to look for it!"

"And then we'd know for sure that someone had been on the *Arabella.*"

"That's the idea. You get on quickly for a girl, Sid. Come on, now, we'll pull the dory round to the starboard side."

Sidney caught herself tiptoeing across the deck of the *Arabella.* In her excitement she scarcely breathed. Every move, every act, was fraught with significance. Lavender took the precaution to beach the dory at an abandoned wharf near Sunset Lane.

"Just as well not to show ourselves 'round Rockman's."

"When can we go out to the *Arabella?*"

"Not 'till four o'clock. We can go out to swim just like we always do. Even if they see us they won't think it's funny for us to do that. They'd think it funnier if we didn't."

Sidney admitted the truth of this, but wondered how she could live until four o'clock!

As they walked up Sunset Lane Sidney reminded Lavender that, because of their promise, they ought to tell Mart. But when they stopped at the Calkins' house they found that Mart had already gone to Gert Bartow's.

"Oh, dear," sighed Sidney, with an added pang of remorse.

At four o'clock Sidney and Lavender went out to the *Arabella* to swim as they had done always before Pola's coming. Except for a brightness in Sidney's eyes, an alertness about her whole body, and the occasional significant glances that passed between them they both appeared quite normal. Lav talked casually of the heat of the day.

"Gee, the water'll feel great. This is the hottest day we've had yet."

"I can't wait to get in." Most certainly Jed Starrow, had he been listening, could not have guessed how closely Nemesis pressed upon his heels!

Lavender pulled up alongside of the *Arabella* and deliberately made the boat fast.

"We got to act as though we haven't found the knife, y'see," he warned. "As though we were going just swimming."

In her eagerness to board the *Arabella* Sidney stumbled. Lavender had to clutch her to keep her from tumbling into the water.

"Oh!" They both cried in one sound as they clambered to the deck—for the knife was gone!

"Well, *that* means they'd been on the *Arabella*.

Jed Starrow dropped that knife and he missed it and came back to look for it!"

"Lav, I believe they've hidden their treasure on the *Arabella!*" Sidney still reverted to the more romantic terms of buccaneering. "Let's look for it now!"

"With 'em watching maybe from the *Puritan?* I guess not. We got to go ahead and swim the way we always do, Sid. Don't let's even appear to be talking about anything. Come on, I'll beat you in!"

For the space of the few minutes while the water closed about her with delicious coolness Sidney forgot everything in an intoxication of delight. Presently she came back to the *Arabella* and climbed aboard with a sigh of utter content. "Thank goodness *I* haven't any complexes," she laughed, shaking the salt drops from her bobbed head. "And now what?"

Lavender pulled on the light sweater he had worn over his bathing suit.

"When it gets dark I'm coming out to the *Arabella* and stay all night. Maybe they'll come back and I'll find out why. That fellow said something 'bout Rockman's not being safe. They'll learn the *Arabella* isn't safe either!"

"But Lav, I'm coming with you!"

"You can't. And this isn't any work for a girl to get mixed up in."

Sidney drew herself to her full height.

"Lavender Green, if you think you're going to

lose me *now* you're mistaken. I guess we went into this in a sort of partnership and it's going to hold. I found out just as much as you did! And if you come out to the *Arabella, I'm* coming, and Mart, too, if she's home."

Lav still hesitated.

"Aunt Achsa won't let you. How'd you get away?"

This staggered Sidney for a moment, then she thought of a "way." This was Wednesday night and Miss Letty had said that on Wednesday night she was going to drive to Truro and that Sidney might go with her. From Truro Miss Letty was going on to Wellfleet. Aunt Achsa would think Sidney wanted to see Cap'n Davies again. She explained all this breathlessly to Lavender. "This is important enough to warrant a fib. And when it's all over Aunt Achsa will understand. Let's go home now and find Mart."

Unwillingly Lavender conceded Sidney's right to share with him his night's vigil at any cost. Again they beached the dory near Sunset Lane.

Now they found Mart at home. Sidney put her head in the door, made certain that gran'ma was not in hearing, and cried "Hook!"

Mart had only to look once at Sidney's face to know that something had happened. Sidney dragged her out to the Lane and there she and Lavender, in words as quick as pistol shots, told the story.

"Meet us down on the beach near Milligan's at eight o'clock," Lav whispered, as they parted.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GLEAM

EXACTLY at the appointed hour Sidney met Lavender on the beach. She was breathless and a little worried for it had been neither easy nor to her liking to deceive Aunt Achsa. Aunt Achsa had declared that a storm was "comin'" for she could smell it in the air and Tillie Higgins had seen Sam Doolittle start for the backside with his pike pole and that meant a blow for Sam didn't waste steps. "'Tisn't likely Letty Vine'll *go* to Truro tonight."

"But I'll *see* if she's going, anyway," Sidney had cried and had raced off, a sweater over her arm.

"I wish I could tell her how very important it is and then she'd understand, but I can't for maybe she wouldn't understand," Sidney thought as she hurried to the rendezvous.

"Gee, how'd you ever get away?" asked Lav, admiringly, but Sidney had no opportunity to explain for at that moment Mart joined them, eager and excited.

"I put some cookies in my pocket," she exclaimed. "You can't tell what'll happen."

"Good. And I've got matches."

Sidney wished she had thought of something to bring. Lav went on:

"It isn't dark enough to go out yet. We got

to be awful careful. You girls sort o' walk up the beach as though we weren't all together."

Lavender was actually pale and his eyes burned fiercely. Sidney looked at him admiringly. She knew he was not thinking of the reward but of the fair name of the Cape.

Obediently the girls strolled up the beach. And, as they turned, a voice hailed them. To their consternation Pola came flying toward them.

At sight of her Sidney bit her lips with vexation. She gave a sidewise glance at Mart and saw Mart's chin set stubbornly.

"Sidney—wait a minute!" Pola called and Sidney could do nothing but wait until Pola came up to them.

"I thought you were going to stay in Chatham tonight."

"I should say *not!*" Pola had enough breath to make her answer expressive. "I was never so bored in my life. Those Truxton girls are *stupid.* And I kept wondering what you were doing. I coaxed mother to let Shields bring me back and she said she would provided I came and stayed with you tonight. Can you squeeze me in? Dug will give me his room, I know."

Sidney cast a wild glance toward Mart. She started to answer, then stopped. Pola looked from her to Mart and back again to Sidney.

"What's the mystery? If you don't want me I'll go to the hotel."

"Oh, Pola, it isn't that. It's—it's—"

"Sidney Romley I'll bet you're up to something! And if you are, you simply have got to let me in on it! I'm just pepped up to some excitement. Tell me what's up."

The girls turned slowly and walked toward Lav and the dory, Pola between them.

"It isn't any fun," Sidney explained slowly. "It's something serious—and—and dangerous. And you'll have to ask Mart and Lav if you can come with us."

"You'll let me go, won't you, Mart?" Pola begged with friendly entreaty, forgetting she had ever thought Mart a riot.

Sidney introduced Pola to Lavender and turned away that she might not see the pain that flashed across Lavender's face.

"Pola came back to stay all night with me. She wants to go with us and if she doesn't I guess I'll have to go back home."

"I'll do anything you say," promised Pola. "I'm so curious that I'm fairly bursting."

"I don't care, but you'll have to take off your shoes and stockings," muttered Lav, scarcely looking at Pola.

"Oh, I'll do that! I'll do *anything!*" Pola flopped upon the beach and commenced removing her sport shoes. "And I won't even ask any questions

until you're ready to tell me." Rising, her small feet pink against the sand, she saluted Lav with mock solemnity.

"There, Captain Lavender Green, I'm at your command."

Her pretty acquiescence won the girls at once. If any doubt assailed them as to the prudence of letting Pola go, their admiration for Pola's gameness stilled it. Sidney rolled Pola's shoes and stockings and her own in her sweater and hid them behind some logs. Then the little party waded out to the dory and embarked.

"We're going to the *Arabella*," Sidney whispered to Pola. She felt Pola shiver, but the girl made no protest. "We have to go 'round this way so's no one can see us from the harbor. Sh—h!"

Silently they boarded the old hull, Lavender last. With the line from the dory in his hand the boy considered.

"If anyone comes up and sees the dory they'll know someone's aboard."

"That's true. What'll we do?" whispered Sidney, anxiously.

"We can set her adrift. It's an old tub anyway."

"But how'll we get ashore?"

"The tide'll be out towards morning."

"You mean *swim?*" cried Pola. "But I *can't* swim! I—I—"

True, Pola's complex! Sidney hastened to reassure her.

"When the tide's out it won't be over your head. And I'll help you."

Lavender had already let the line of the dory slip out of his hand. They saw the old boat become a shadowy outline as the tide carried it slowly away, then—nothing. Pola caught Sidney's hand and held it.

"I'm not frightened—but it's so—*spooky!*"

It had been decided that they should conceal themselves in the fo'castle cabin. They groped their way forward, Sidney guiding Pola in the dark, for Lavender dared not light any of his matches. Stumbling, scarcely breathing, they slipped down the companion ladder and crawled into the small, ill-ventilated cabin. Sidney sat down upon some tarpaulins. Pola crouched close to Sidney's side. Lav and Mart stowed themselves upon one of the bunks.

"There—now we'll wait!"

"I—I wish I knew what *for!*" whispered Pola. The smell of rank bilge water, the lift and drop of the boat sickened her. The wind was whining and that and the swish of the water against the sides of the boat terrified the girl.

In a few short words Lav vouchsafed Pola a little information. Like Sidney he admired the girl's gameness though he was beginning to wish they had not let her come.

"How long do you think we'll have to wait? And what if no one comes?"

"We'll have to wait until most morning anyway before the tide is out. And if no one comes tonight we'll have to come out again, that's all. We're not in this business for any fun!"

"Oh—h!" sighed Pola, clinging closer to Sidney.

The wind howled over their heads with increasing velocity and Sidney thought involuntarily of the snugness of Miss Letty's buggy. Miss Letty was probably almost to Truro now. And Aunt Achsa thought she was with her!

"Is—is the boat tied tight?" asked Pola; and Lav assured her that it was. "The wind could get a lot worse and you'd be as safe out here as in your bed at home."

After a long while Mart muttered, "What's that?" The others leaned forward in the blackness of the cabin. They had all felt rather than heard a soft thud as though something had touched the side of the boat. And in a few moments heavy footsteps came straight toward the fo'castle.

"Oh, will they come *here?*" breathed Pola, shaking. And for answer Sidney caught Pola's arm with a warning clutch.

For an instant it seemed that the footsteps must descend to the cabin. But at the companionway they halted. A voice came, heavy and thick.

"I tell you it ain't safe to take it off now. They got a man on Rockman's and another on Teal's and no knowin' how many in the bay! Every constable on the Cape's here, damn them! And old Davies's been 'round all day and he ain't rigged up for any picnic!"

"If we don't take it off tonight Lav Green may find it—or that girl—"

At that someone laughed, horribly. "Huh—*him!* Why we could twist every crooked bone in his body until he wouldn't know 'em. Him—ha, that's a joke! Why, a look 'ud scare him to a pulp. The girl, too."

Sidney, reaching her hand out instinctively, caught Lavender's and held it tight. She felt the writhing of his body.

A new voice broke in above them. "I got a better scheme. Listen. We'll—" But the voices suddenly died to silence; the footsteps moved away.

The four, huddled in the darkness of the cabin, drew long trembling breaths.

"Lav, those diamonds are on this boat!"

"Sh—h. I know it. But we got to be careful. They haven't gone yet. We got to wait. And we'll wait until we find 'em. Damn them *I'll* show them who's crooked!"

"Hush," implored Sidney. "Of course you will."

"Isn't it most morning? I—I wish I was home," quavered Pola; but no one paid any heed to her.

With the howling of the wind, the slap-slap of the water, it was difficult to make out whether the men had left the boat or not. Once Lav crawled to the top of the companion ladder but a muttering like a human voice drove him back. Queer sounds struck upon their sensitized ears. And the boat seemed to lift to a new motion.

They waited for an interminable time. Then Mart spoke quickly.

"Lav, we're moving!"

Lav needed no warning. He, too, had missed the pull of the boat on the anchor rope. He shot up the ladder.

"Oh, what's the matter?" cried Sidney and Pola, forgetting all caution.

Mart had no time to explain her fears. In an instant Lav was back, fairly throwing himself into the cabin.

"We're drifting! They cut the anchor rope. We're drifting out! Fast! Way out! To sea!"

That had been the "better scheme." To cut the *Arabella* free from its mooring and let the wind and tide carry it out into the bay. At first Starrow had not favored the plan; he had declared that it was too much risk, that the wind was shifting and freshening fast and that the old tub might open a seam, but Joe Josephs had convinced him with: "the

Arabella would be good for a week out in a nastier sea than this. It's safer than riskin' runnin' afoul one of Phin Davies' men ashore. Guthrie's *Sally*'ll stand this squall and pick up the *Arabella* easy and we can reckon sure on the course the old tub'll take, even 'lowin' for the wind to shift."

As she comprehended what had happened Pola screamed. Mart and Sidney dragged her with them up the ladder. Lav was at the side of the boat tearing off his blouse.

"Oh, Lav, what'll we do! What are you going to do now?" cried Sidney.

"It's so black," wailed Pola. "I'm—sick!"

"I'm going to swim ashore. It's the only way. I don't know how long this old tub'll stand a sea and the wind's rising. We got to get help."

"You shan't swim alone, Lavender Green. We'll *all* swim. That's nothing of a swim—"

"You can't! You forget—Pola."

Sidney wheeled in consternation. "Pola's complex!" The girl was crouched, now, on the deck, an abject, wailing figure.

"You go with Lav, Mart," said Sidney in a quiet voice. "I'll stay with Pola."

"What do you think I am? I guess I'll stay with her too!"

"But your grandmother—"

"Oh, gran'ma!" Mart's voice choked. "But she'd be the one to *tell* me to stay—"

"It's no use our all trying it," muttered Lav. "I'll get there or I won't get anywhere."

"Maybe it's too far for you to swim!" Sidney was at Lavender's side, her hands on his arm. The boy's form in its light underwear showed pitifully crooked but Sidney saw him straight and she saw the gleam in his eyes. Suddenly she remembered what Vick had said so lightly about the Grail. Ah, she was seeing its gleam now, transcendently beautiful, in Lav's eyes! She dropped her hold of his arm.

"You see, I've *got* to try it, Sid." And she understood. He went on: "I'll swim for the lighthouse. They can telephone from there to Rockman's. You girls find a light and signal with it. Don't lose your nerve, Sid." He poised for an instant on the rail then plunged into the black water.

"Oh, *Lav,*" cried Sidney. She leaned far over the side of the boat. She could see nothing but a crest of foam. "Mart, he's—he's—drowned!"

Pola screamed again.

CHAPTER XX

"THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG!"

IN THE sunny embrasure of Mrs. White's morning room Trude Romley sorted over the mail that Pepper, the butler, had brought in. So gay and colorful was the room itself with its cretonnes, its soft tinted walls, its singing birds, in wicker cages, that it seemed a part of the fragrant garden that crowded close to the French windows. A tiny fountain splashed azure blue water over delicately sculptured nymphs; a flowering vine trailed around the windows.

The mail arranged, Trude sat back in the cushions of a great wicker chair and with a long breath of delight enjoyed the beauty around her. Each day Edgeacres enraptured her anew and roused in her a wonder as to why it should be her lot to be there. "It ought to be Vick or Issy," she would apologize to the nodding flowers or to Mitie, the yellow warbler.

And as might be expected Trude had found innumerable ways of making herself useful to Mrs. White as an expression of her gratitude. There were telephone calls she could answer, letters she could write, shopping she could do, ordering, she even conferred with old Pepper and Jonathan, the gardener. She drove with Mrs. White in the afternoon and served tea to the callers who flocked to the house from the nearby summer hotels.

"I do not know how I ever got along without you, my dear," Mrs. White had said more than once. "What do you do to make yourself so invaluable? It seems as though just to look at you one leans on you! Even Pepper is saying 'Miss Trude thinks this and Miss Trude thinks that—'"

Her benevolent interest in her husband's wards, a certain pride in saying to her friends: "My husband, you know, is looking after the daughters of Joseph Romley, who was a college friend of his," had grown into a real fondness for Trude. "I have never appreciated the dear girl when she's been with us before," she declared to her husband. "I suppose it was because we were in town, then, and I was too busy to get acquainted with her. Why, she's really pretty. And she makes such a slave of herself to her sisters! She hasn't any life of her own. I don't believe they appreciate it, either. It's a shame she doesn't marry some nice young man—" Mrs. White's kind always found virtue's reward in the proverbial "nice young man."

Mr. White agreed with her on every point but this. "If she deserted that household it would fall! She's the only one that isn't like her father."

"Then she must find someone who'll take the family with her," Mrs. White asserted determinedly. But having no godmother's fairy wand she had not been able, during the summer weeks, to bring the

prince to Edgeacres; her husband's acquaintances were too bald and round to play the part of princes.

Trude had not minded the dearth of young men. Since her unhappy experience on a former visit she was glad of that dearth. The serenity of the summer, the relaxation and rest from responsibilities had brought a lovely freshness to her face, a brightness to her eyes that was not all a reflection of the brightness about her. The sheer luxury of loafing, of not having to think out petty problems or worry one single minute was all her old-young heart now asked. Once in awhile, of course, she fretted because Isolde was not enjoying Edgeacres with her, or getting to know how really nice Aunt Edith White was. Where Vick and Sidney were concerned she had no remorse for Vick was seeing new lands, doubtless conquering them, and Sidney was happy at Cape Cod; but she could not help thinking that Issy must be working too hard at the Deerings—getting up early in the morning and typing all through the hot day and doubtless fussing over the housework and the small babies as well.

Trude thought of the mail. Again there had been no letter from either Issy or Sidney! Sidney really *ought* to write. Perhaps it *had* not been wise to let her go off alone with relatives of whom they knew nothing!

Suddenly a postmark on one of the letters on the little table at her elbow caught her eye. Province-

town. Trude caught it up apprehensively. That letter might be from their Cousin Achsa! She turned it over and over, wishing she might open it.

"Good morning, my dear! I get up with the birds myself and find that you're up before me!"

Trude laughed, to cover her anxiety. "I told Jonathan I'd inspect his new beds this morning."

"There, didn't I say you were supplanting me in Jonathan's esteem? But he only wants you to admire them and smile at him. He knows you know nothing about gardens, even though you are a very wise young woman! Ah, the mail—is there anything there worth looking at before breakfast?"

"Two cards, three advertising envelopes and—and two personal letters." Trude held out the two letters, her heart beating in her throat.

Mrs. White glanced at them indifferently. She turned one as though to tear open the envelope, then stopped to play with Mitie. Next she gave her attention to Pepper who appeared in the door to summon her to breakfast. And all the time Trude's eyes were beseeching her to open them—to open *one* of them quickly.

Trude followed her into the breakfast room and sat down across from her. After she had eaten her fruit Mrs. White took up the envelope that was postmarked Provincetown and studied it while Trude waited.

"Why, that's from Laura Craig—a cousin of

mine. I remember now she said she was going to study in a summer school on Cape Cod. I hope the girl's getting on. She's dependent upon her own labor." As she spoke she spread out the sheet. A sketch dropped to the table.

Trude drew a long breath. She had not known how worried she was. She wanted to laugh aloud now from sheer relief. Because she had to do something she took up the sketch with a murmured: "May I?"

"Laura writes it's a little sketch she made in class. 'This will show you I am improving. It's from life. It will give you an idea of the delightful types we find around here, types that you will not find anywhere else. These are two little vagabonds whom you see almost anytime on the beach or around the wharves—as wild and free and beautiful as the seagulls—'"

Mrs. White looked up from the letter to take the sketch and exclaimed aloud at Trude's face. It had gone deathly white.

"My *dear,* what is it?"

For a moment Trude could not answer. She was staring at the sketch as though she could not take her eyes from it.

"Read that again! These are types—you find these girls any time on the wharves—wild—vagabonds! Oh, Aunt Edith that's—*that's—Sidney!*"

"Why, it *can't* be, Trude. You said—"

Trude shook her head. "I can't help what I said. It's Sidney. I—know. The likeness is true—there can't be anyone else who looks like Sidney! But she's barefooted—and—and so—*slovenly*—and—*her hair!* She's cut her beautiful hair!"

Mrs. White took the sketch forcibly from Trude. She frowned over it. One of the girls certainly did look like Sidney as she remembered the child from their one meeting.

"How do you explain it, Trude?"

Trude sighed heavily. "I can't explain it. There's something wrong somewhere. And it's my fault, Aunt Edith. I—I consented—we all consented to let Sidney go off down there just so that we could go ahead with our own plans. But we thought—we felt *certain* that these cousins were very nice—I—I mean had a lovely home and were rich so that Sidney might get something out of her visit that she couldn't get at home. It sounds shameful to *say* it."

"I understand, my dear. But what made you think so?"

"The—the letter this Cousin Achsa wrote. It *was* a very nice letter!"

"Well, *I* have always thought you could judge anyone's character and background by a letter. There must be something wrong. This girl—" pointing to the sketch, "is positively shocking! At least she would be around here."

"I remember now something Sidney said—when

she was begging us to let her go away. 'I want to be different! I want to go somewhere where I won't be Joseph Romley's daughter. I want adventure and to do exciting things—' Those were her very words! I didn't take them seriously then, but, oh, Aunt Edith, perhaps she meant them more than we guessed!" Poor Trude rose quickly to her feet. "Aunt Edith, I simply *must* go to Provincetown at once. May I ask Pepper to find out about trains? You'll—you'll understand, won't you? I can't be happy one minute until I see the child. I feel that it's all my fault."

Mrs. White was all concern. She summoned Pepper and instructed him to find out the first train; she sent her maid to Trude's room to pack her clothes. And last she wrote a generous check.

"You may need it, my dear. It is nothing. Don't thank me. I wish I could do more. Somehow your shoulders seem too young to carry so much responsibility!"

So on the selfsame day that Sidney and the others set out upon their adventure Trude was journeying to Cape Cod. She missed connections at Boston and hired an automobile to take her to Provincetown, in her heart thanking Mrs. White for the check that made this possible. Two blow-outs delayed her journey so that it was midnight when she reached her destination. She could scarcely hunt out the Greens and Sidney at that hour. She took a

room at the hotel for the night and sat for a while at its window straining her eyes out into the darkness. The howling of the wind intensified her apprehension; somewhere out in that strange blackness that enwrapped her was her little sister. Perhaps Sidney needed her that very moment!

Finally she crept into bed and fell into a troubled sleep. She did not hear the running steps that passed under her window or the muffled voices of excited men.

CHAPTER XXI

"WHAT THE NIGHT HELD"

"OH—H, take me back to the cabin!" moaned Pola.

"I guess we might as well," muttered Mart. Their matches had been long since exhausted; they had been of little avail for the one ship's light on the boat was without oil.

One on each side of her, Mart and Sidney helped Pola down into the cabin. The boat was rolling heavily now in the rough sea, each lift and drop sending terror to the three young hearts. In the blackness of the night the waves looked mountain high. Even Mart was glad to shut them from view.

"If—if we're going to drown I'd rather drown in—a—room," gasped Pola, clinging to Sidney and burying her face in Sidney's shoulder.

It seemed to the girls as though months had passed since Lav had plunged to what they felt certain was his death. The *Arabella* had tossed about on the roughening water like some wild thing, her old timbers creaking and groaning under their new living. Just at first Sidney and Mart had been too concerned in quieting the panic-stricken Pola to face their danger; not until Pola had exhausted herself did they think of their possible fate.

Unless Lav succeeded in reaching the beach and giving an alarm, they might toss about for days or be dashed to pieces on some reef. Or, worse fate, Jed Starrow and his gang might find the boat and—

"Wh-at are you thinking about, Mart?" whispered Sidney after a long time of silence, broken only by the howling of the wind and the pounding of the water. "Let's talk—and then we can't hear—"

"Don't be afraid, Sidney," Mart spoke calmly. "You sort o' belong to the Cape and we Cape folks don't think anything of drowning. We sort of expect to, sometime—" But here her voice broke with a tremble. "I—I was thinking of gran'ma. I wish I'd been better to her. I talk back to her lots of times when I shouldn't."

"But you *are* good to her, Mart. And—*I* was thinking of Aunt Achsa. I shouldn't have deceived her—about coming out here. I fooled myself into thinking that even a lie didn't matter considering what we were trying to do. But the honor of Cape Cod isn't worth anything happening to Lav. And if anything does happen there won't be anyone to tell about Jed Starrow, anyway! Oh, Mart, I can't bear to *think* about Lav. Why did we let him do it? Dear old Lav. I've been mean to him, too. He adores poetry and I—I never even told him that my father was a poet and that I know lots and lots of poems and—and—that I've written most a book myself."

"Honest, Sid, was your father a poet? And you can write it yourself? Gee," softly. "I wish I could do something like that. I'd rather be like that than anything else. I just pretend that I hate school and books and such things—it's because I had to stop going to school to stay with gran'ma that I've put on that I didn't have any use for it. Even when I was sort of laughing at you, Sid, down in my heart I was feeling aw'fly proud that you'd want to fool 'round with anyone like me—I'll *always* be proud."

"Oh, Mart—" Sidney faltered. "I wish I could put into words what Mr. Dugald taught me when I first came here. That it's the big inside things that really count. He told me so's I'd see Aunt Achsa and Lav as they really are. And, Mart, your giving up school to take care of your grandmother is a big thing, a real thing! You don't want to forget it."

"Oh, I'm—I'm—sick!" broke in Pola.

"Sit up straight and talk and you won't think about it," commanded Mart, so sternly that Pola straightened, her white face wan in the darkness.

"I don't see how you *can* talk when you're—may be—going—to die!"

"Well, talking helps you more than crying."

"But I—I don't *want* to—die."

"Who does?" retorted Mart roughly. Nevertheless, touched by Pola's helplessness, she found Pola's

hand and held it close in hers. "But let's face whatever happens with our heads up!"

"To the wind," breathed Sidney, shivering.

"I—I just can't be brave like you two. I—I'm an awful coward. I can't help it. I've always been afraid to even try to swim. I'm afraid of lots of things. Oh, I'm afraid to—to—"

Sidney caught Pola's other hand.

"Don't say it, Pola. Maybe someone will find us. And probably you can't help feeling afraid."

Mart suddenly remembered the cookies she had brought. She found them where she had hidden them at the back of one of the bunks.

"Here, eat a cookie and you'll forget things. I'm hungry, aren't you, too?"

Pola ate with nervous greed. Sidney bit off a piece but found it dry in her mouth. She was thinking of her sisters and the safety of the dear old house; as vividly as though it hung in a picture before her eyes she saw the little circle around the dining room table, the embroidered square of Indian cloth, the green shaded lamp, Issy's books and Trude's sewing, Vick's sketching things, the girls at their beloved tasks—and her chair empty! Oh, what if she never sat again in that dear circle? Her heart broke in an agony of longing for Trude.

A sudden thought roused Pola to a feeble show of spirit.

"If I had known how to swim we'd all be ashore

now! And you two stayed with me! I—I don't believe I'm worth that, girls." She spoke with gloomy conviction.

But Mart answered with a promptness that settled that question forever. "Forget it. Why, you don't think we could a' done anything else, do you? And now I'm going up on deck and get some air. We must be most to Halifax by this time."

"*Halifax!*" But this time Pola did not scream.

* * * * *

Lavender, after his first plunge, had struck out toward the lighthouse. His Mr. Dugald had taught him the science of swimming and because it was the one thing he could do easily and well, in spite of his misshaped body, Lavender had taken pride in perfecting the practice. His assurance helped him now; he had no fear, he knew how to save his strength; he swam first with one stroke, then with another, always keeping in sight the beacon of light.

But after a little it came to him that the yellow gleam did not seem any closer; in fact, it grew fainter; he knew then, with a moment's panic, that the tide and wind were too strong for him. He cursed his frail strength, with a smarting in his eyes that did not come from the salt water.

There was only one thing he could do. Turn his back on the friendly light and strike out in the direction of the beach. It would be further, but the cross

currents of the tide would not impede his progress so much.

For a long time he fought ahead stubbornly, changing his strokes, even swimming on his back. But his breath came with increasing difficulty, a sharp pain stabbed at his side. He labored on. The pain grew sharper and caught at him like a horrible vise. Once he yielded to it and sank down, down into the black water. But it passed and, as he rose, he struck out again, blindly, now, for he had lost all sense of direction.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" he shouted in his heart. His Aunt Achsa's God, whose All-embracing Love he had questioned because that God had made him crooked, must help him now! "I *got* to get help!" God *must* hear him.

A great exhaustion seized him. He sank again with a quivering breath. But now his feet touched sand. With new strength he plunged ahead. Again he was in deep water but he swam with eager strokes. The dreadful pain stabbed but he did not heed. Now he saw moving lights. He was near the beach! With a heartbreaking effort he fought the strength of the water, finally gaining the shallow depths. He heard voices nearby in the darkness.

Knee-deep in the water he tried to shout but he had no strength. A terrible faintness was creeping over him. His arms outstretched, he stumbled forward toward the voices. Oh, he must *not* yield to

that overpowering sleepiness until he had made them know!

"Help—help!" he gasped, reeling toward the shadowy forms.

"What the blazes—" A man ran forward. Two others came at his heels.

"Why, *it's Lav Green!*" one of them cried.

"The *Arabella*—adrift out there—Sidney's on it—oh—*help!*" And then Lavender slipped into the strong arms that reached out to catch him.

"Quick, the *Sally!* She's at Rockman's!" Captain Davies ran toward Rockman's wharf. Before Jed Starrow's men, concealed behind the shed, could guess their intention, three men had jumped into the big motor boat and had swung her free of the wharf.

"What the hell—" shouted an ugly voice after them, but the *Sally* only chugged out into the darkness of the bay.

* * * * *

"Look, Sid—light! It's—it's — morning!" Mart's voice came in a thin whisper. For a long time the girls had lain huddled against the taff-rail of the boat, too weary and disheartened to even talk.

Sidney lifted her face to the tiny streak of light that gleamed palely in the east.

Then she shook Pola ever so slightly. Poor Pola had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion. She stirred now with a little cry. "What is it?"

"It's morning—daylight. See—there—"

"Oh—h!" Pola whimpered. "Is that all?" She clung to Sidney in fresh terror. "If we're going to die—I'd rather not *see*—"

"Hark," cried Mart, suddenly leaning forward. "Don't you hear something? Girls, that's a motor boat! I *know!* Quick. Let's signal! Yell! Wave something! *Anything!*" She sprang to her feet, leaning her body against the rail for support as the boat rolled in the heavy sea. She cupped her hands to her lips and shouted lustily. "Come on, girls!" she commanded.

"Maybe it's the pirates," wailed Pola.

"I don't care if it is! I don't care *what* it is!" And Mart and Sidney lifted their chorus.

Out of the mist that lay over the surging water a small, gray object gradually shaped. The chug-chug of an engine now came distinctly to their ears. After a little they could make out the forms of two men standing. And then someone shouted faintly.

Pola, a solemn happiness transfiguring her face, clung to Sidney.

"Girls," she whispered, "We're going to be saved! And I'll never forget this night—never. Or you two. Or what you've done! Or what you *are*. And I'm never going to get over being ashamed of myself!"

Sidney had some solemn resolutions of her own

shaping in her heart but the moment gave her no time to pronounce them.

"Mart!" she cried. "It's *not* Jed Starrow! It's—it's— Cap'n Phin Davies! And that means that —*Lav—made—it!*" And happy tears ran down her cheeks.

Under the skilled guidance of the man at its wheel the *Sally* soon came alongside of the *Arabella.* Cap'n Davies promptly boarded the schooner and the next instant Sidney was in his arms.

"All I'll say is praise be to God!" the old mariner muttered. "And now I cal'late you and your mates here are 'bout ready to abandon your cruisin'—"

"Lav, is he—all right?" demanded Sidney, still clinging to Cap'n Phin.

"Well, he jest about made port and how he is now I can't say for I didn't waste any time shippin' in the *Sally.* Lucky for us it was lyin' there at Rockman's. Give us a hand, Saunders, while we load on this cargo of distress!" A roughness in the old man's voice betrayed that the big heart was not as light as he would have the girls think. For hours they had searched the bay with only their knowledge of tides and winds to guide them; more than once the others had been ready to abandon the search as futile, but the Captain had held them stubbornly to it.

Pola needed no urging but leaped into the *Sally* and sank to its bottom with a long gasp of relief.

Sidney and Mart were about to follow her example when a word from Cap'n Davies held Sidney.

"We'll let a government boat pick up the *Arabella.* We'll take no chances tryin' to tow her in with the *Sally.*" And then Sidney thought of the treasure.

"But the diamonds!" she cried.

"*Diamonds*—" Cap'n Davies stared at her, his mouth open.

"Why, yes, they're on this boat. They *must* be! We were in the forward cabin watching and Jed Starrow came on board and they talked right where we could hear. They were going to take them off and then they decided it wasn't safe and they'd wait and they went away. And then they must have cut the boat adrift. But we're *sure* they're on this boat."

"So that was it! Of all the low-down dastardly tricks! Well, never mind your diamonds, now. We got to get back to shore and let a few folks know—"

"But I won't *go* until we've looked!" Sidney protested, almost in tears. "Why, that was why we risked everything! And Lav wants to save the name of the Cape—the—the way—you do! Oh, *please* look!"

The old Captain dropped his hold of the girl's arm. "Well, I'll be ding-blasted!" he stormed. But he motioned to Saunders. "Climb aboard and give us a hand. 'Taint likely they'd hide their stuff above deck. You look round the stern and the girls and

me'll give a hunt forward. Of all the stubborn, crazy-headed female pieces you'll beat 'em all!"

While Saunders searched the stern of the schooner the Captain and Sidney and Mart searched the fo'-castle cabin. Sidney, tugging away the heavy tarpaulins, disclosed a small wooden box.

"I'm *sure* it wasn't there before—" she cried. "Why—why, I was *sitting* on it—"

Cap'n Davies lifted the box. "It's pretty big to be diamonds but it looks suspicious like! And you're sure it wasn't there before? That it ain't the property of that summer boarder of Miss Green's?

Sidney's face was flaming with excitement. "Oh, I'm *sure!* The other stuff was there but there wasn't any box under it. If I hadn't been so excited listening I'd have realized I was sitting on something different. Can't we look inside?"

"We won't take the time to look at anything now, mate. We'll get ashore. I reckon by this time there are folks strainin' their eyes for a sight o' you—"

He fairly pushed Sidney and Mart ahead of him and toward the *Sally*. Saunders lifted the girls into the smaller boat, then took the box.

"To Rockman's. Quick as you can make it," snapped Cap'n Phin.

CHAPTER XXII

"YOU NEED A BIG BROTHER"

AUNT ACHSA had not slept through the storm. Accustomed though she was to the howl of the wind and the roar of the pounding surf, tonight it filled her heart with dread. Lavender had not come home.

Twice during the night hours she crept to the door of his small room and peered in, shielding her candle with a trembling hand. For a long while she sat in the window straining her eyes into the darkness. The cats came and rubbed her bare ankles and Nip meowed plaintively. She picked him up and cuddled him to her.

Suddenly a moving object in the lane caught her attention. It separated itself into the forms of men, men moving slowly as though they bore a burden. They turned into the garden patch.

"Lavender!" Aunt Achsa cried, jumping up quickly, shaking. "Oh—my boy!"

But that was the only sound she made. She opened the door as though she had been waiting for these men with their limp burden. She directed them to carry the boy to his own room. She moved aside for Doctor Blackwell who had come with the others, an old pair of flannel trousers drawn over his night shirt. She felt Mr. Dugald put a restrain-

ing arm over her shoulders and nodded as though to say: "I'm all right—just look out for Lavender."

One of the men coming back from Lavender's room offered an explanation. "Those young 'uns were on the *Arabella* and it broke from its moorin's. The boy swum ashore to give an alarm. Plucky, I say—don't know how he did it."

"Those young ones—*who?*" cried Dugald Allan.

"Why, I cal'late that gal Sidney and I don't know who else—"

"Sidney went with Miss Vine!" protested Achsa.

But at that moment Miss Letty appeared in the door, as scantily clad as the doctor had been. From her window which faced Doctor Blackwell's house, she had heard the men summoning him. She had lost no time in getting to Sunset Lane.

"Who went with me? Where? What's happened?"

Now Aunt Achsa let her whole weight drop against Mr. Dugald.

"Didn't Sidney go 'long to Truro with you?" she asked falteringly.

"I didn't go to Truro. Knew this storm was comin'. Where—"

"Oh—h!" Aunt Achsa moaned. Mr. Dugald motioned to Miss Vine.

"Take care of things—here. I'm off—"

"Cap'n Davies and Jim Saunders and Pete Cady's gone out in the *Sally,*" cried one of the men who

had brought Lavender home. But Dugald Allan had plunged into the darkness without hearing him. The men rushed after him.

Miss Vine pushed Aunt Achsa into a chair.

"You're not going to cross any bridges 'til you come to them, Achsy Green. Doctor Blackwell brought Lav into this world and he isn't going to let him quit it without putting up a pretty good fight. Jeremiah Berry's in with him and he's as good as two women. You wrap that shawl 'round you 'til I can light a lamp and get you some clothes. You're shivering like it was December. I'll put the kettle over, too—"

Oddly huge and gaunt in the shadowy room, Miss Vine moved and talked briskly to keep up Aunt Achsa's nerve and her own against the black fear that held them.

Mr. Dugald ran with all speed to Rockman's, the other men after him. As their hurrying steps echoed through the silent street heads popped out of windows, doors opened. Then more men, half-dressed and dressing as they ran, rushed after them toward Rockman's. They knew, with that intuition inbred in seacoast communities, that something was wrong. Old Simon Tibbetts, too crippled to join the gathering crowds, rang up Commander Nelson at the Life Guard station on the backside.

When, in the gray light of the dawn, the *Sally* chugged up to Rockman's wharf with its precious

cargo Sidney and Mart found a weary, anxious crowd of men and women gathered there. And as Cap'n Davies and Saunders lifted the girls ashore a lusty shout of rejoicing went up—eager hands reached out to touch the rescued as though to make certain they were safe and sound.

Sidney had eyes only for Mr. Dugald who seemed to tower above them all, his eyes dark lined with the strain of anxious watching, his mouth set sternly. And strangely enough, at first, Dugald Allan saw only Sidney, yet it was not strange, for the white-faced, shrinking, abject girl, barefooted and dishevelled, who was hiding behind Mart and Sidney, had little semblance to his gay young cousin.

Mr. Dugald opened his arms and Sidney ran into them like a little child, and clung to him. He felt her slender body shaking.

"I—I can't help crying. I wanted Trude—so much!"

"*I* was thinking of Trude, too. Thank God!" But Sidney was too moved at the moment to wonder at his words or that the cheek he bent to hers was wet with tears.

Then Dugald Allan spied Pola shivering forlornly behind Mart and Sidney. "*You*—" he cried, pushing Sidney aside. "I thought you were at Chatham!" His mouth tightened in a straight, stern line. "What is all this? But wait, I must get Sidney back

to Aunt Achsa. You shall explain things as we go along."

He hurried the girls through the crowd which parted, smilingly, to let them pass. On Commercial Street he hailed old Hiram Moss, who with an eye to business in the midst of tragedy, had harnessed his horses to his ancient cab and had them ready for an emergency.

After he had bundled his charges in Dugald Allan turned to Sidney.

"Now give me some inkling of what started this crazy adventure. Thank God it has not ended as it might have ended though Lavender is still fighting for his life! Answer me, Sidney."

But before Sidney could begin her tale she had to know what had happened to Lavender.

"Fighting for his life? But—he *got here,* didn't he?"

"Yes—he reached shore, by an effort so great as to completely prostrate him. They took him home. I left Doctor Blackwell with him." Dugald Allan spoke shortly and his crisp sentences had the effect of stunning poor Sidney. She shivered and leaned close to him. Her voice, when she spoke, came with a childish tremor.

"Oh, Lavender *can't* die. If he does—it will be all my fault! I started everything. I—I told him about the diamonds—"

"*Diamonds—*"

"Yes—the diamonds. That's why we went out on the *Arabella*—" In broken sentences Sidney told the story; she wanted Mr. Dugald to know that they had cared most for the honor of Cape Cod!

"And we found them—a big box—at least we *think* it's the diamonds! Cap'n Phin Davies says it's *something* queer!"

Dugald Allan's exclamation had much the character of an explosion. "*Diamonds!* What nonsense! You've risked bereaving three homes for what is probably nothing more than a case of rum. If ever a girl needed a big brother to keep her in check, you do!"

CHAPTER XXIII

DIAMONDS

DURING the early morning hours of that summer day that Sidney was destined never to forget, the girl passed through every emotion that a fifteen-year-old heart can suffer.

First, to her dismay no one at the cottage had seemed to rejoice, as the crowd on the wharf had rejoiced, at her rescue. When Mr. Dugald led her in Miss Vine was making coffee at the stove and all she said was: "Well, you're all right! Better go to bed now as quick as you can and keep out from under foot." Then Mr. Dugald had taken Pola back to the hotel. Aunt Achsa was with Doctor Blackwell and Lavender. Sidney had tried to summon sufficient courage to ask Miss Vine's forbidding back for some word of Lavender, but the words failed in her throat. Cold, forlorn, hungry, she crept to her room, threw off her clothes and huddled down into the bed-clothes.

They would all blame her—Miss Vine and Mr. Dugald, Aunt Achsa, Doctor Blackwell. Probably now Pola would have more complexes to suffer; Pola's mother would be angry and they could never be friends again. And Mart—Aunt Achsa had said old Mrs. Calkins could be terrible when she was "worked up!" Even if Lavender lived Aunt Achsa would

never forgive her and if he *didn't* live—Mr. Dugald had said he was fighting. Those boards creaking faintly meant that Doctor Blackwell and Aunt Achsa were helping Lavender fight. Dear old Lav with his fine dreams!

The desperate longing for Trude shook her. She sobbed into her pillow. And yet the longing brought only added remorse. Trude would scold her. Trude would take her home. That meant stinging humiliation. How Vick would laugh at her when everything was over. A case of rum! Sidney writhed under the soft covers.

Somewhere boards creaked again—Lavender's fight. Sidney pictured the doctor and Aunt Achsa bending over him. And outside everything was so quiet and gray. That was the way death probably came, Sidney thought.

On the morrow they would send her home—in disgrace. She might not even be allowed to see Lavender, or Mart, or Pola—or Mr. Dugald. Someone would telegraph to Trude and Trude would meet her back at Middletown. She would live a long, sad life of penance behind the crumbing stone wall she had so detested.

But the thought of the wall and the shelter of the old house brought such a surcease of torment that the girl had fallen into a heavy sleep. When she wakened it was to a consciousness of bright sunshine

—and someone looking at her, someone different, and someone smiling.

She sat bolt upright and rubbed her eyes. Then she flung out her arms with a low glad cry that was half sob.

"Trude—*Oh, Trude!*"

Trude held her long and close, stroking the shorn head, murmuring soothing words. Finally Sidney wriggled from her.

"Have you come to take me home? But how could they send for you so quickly? How long have I been asleep? Oh, Lavender—is he—is he—"

"One question at a time, Sid. Lavender is better. He'll be all right, the doctor says, after a good rest. Yes, I think I'd better take you home. No, they did not send for me." Briefly, as though now that earlier concern was of little consequence, Trude told of the sketch that had so bewildered and alarmed her.

"I couldn't understand," she finished.

"I couldn't either, at first. You see the boarder —the man who has boarded here so long and is dreadfully fond of Aunt Achsa wrote that letter to me and wrote it *nice* so as to please her, and, at first —but, oh, Trude, Aunt Aschsa *is* wonderful and so is Lavender, really, truly, even though they are poor—"

"Hush, Sidney." Trude's eyes darkened with feeling. "You do not have to tell me that. I have learned *that* in only a few hours. Oh, I have seen

straight into souls—those kind men on the street, as concerned as though you belonged to them, and here—Aunt Achsa with her great courage and her love. And that Miss Vine—they're so *simple*—and so fine—it made me ashamed of my silly standards, my fears."

"And Lavender is best of all—"

Now quick tears shone like stars in Trude Romley's eyes. She reached out her hands and caught Sidney's.

"Oh, Lavender—when I think what *he* did I—I—" She could not finish, but Sidney understood the gratitude that was in her heart. She leaned her face against Trude's shoulder with a long sigh.

"I'm cured of lots of things, Trude. I wanted something different but I didn't want all *this* to happen! You see I *made* Lavender and Mart believe it was diamonds Jed Starrow was hiding when it was probably only a case of rum—"

Suddenly Trude straightened. "I almost forgot. A boy came here and said a Captain Davies wanted you to come down to Rockman's wharf as soon as you could. That was two hours ago. You see it is nearly noon now. You'd better dress quickly and I'll go out and fix you some breakfast."

Sidney obeyed reluctantly. In her mingled remorse and humiliation she shrank from facing the world. She was not even curious as to why Cap'n Phin wanted to see her.

By the time she had dressed Trude had a poached egg and a glass of milk ready for her. Miss Letty was with Lavender and Aunt Achsa had gone to bed.

Sidney begged so hard that Trude accompany her to Rockman's that Trude put on her hat and went with her. And poor Sidney needed Trude's support for Sunset Lane was thronged with curious men and women; as they walked along the water-front fishermen and tourists and boys and girls stared and nodded and Sidney's sensitive soul mistook their obvious interest for ridicule. She walked with lowered eyes lest she encounter Mrs. Calkins or Pola's mother.

Cap'n Phin was waiting outside the door of the shed on Rockman's wharf. He nodded to Sidney and Trude and beckoned them inside. At any other time, in any other state of mind, Sidney would have thrilled to his air of mystery.

Four men sat in wooden chairs tipped at various angles and on the floor before them stood the wooden box from the *Arabella*. The men nodded and smiled at Sidney and brought their chairs to the floor as though to attention.

Cap'n Davies solemnly motioned Sidney and Trude to two vacant chairs and then cleared his throat.

"I cal'late, Miss Sidney, that you've a sort o' interest in this cargo we brought in on the *Sally* so we stood by 'til you hove in sight. Now, mebbe it's what

we think it is and mebbe it isn't. Si, give a hand and unload."

One of the men knelt down by the box and proceeded to open it with a hammer and a chisel. The others leaned forward with interest. Sidney held her breath.

The man Si, having torn off the cover, put his hands into the paper wrappings and drew forth yards and yards of magnificently embroidered fabric that made Sidney and Trude gasp in admiration and astonishment. But the others were plainly disappointed. A low murmur of disgust went around the room.

"Give it here," one of the men asked. And as Si handed over the contraband it slipped from his hands. He caught at it quickly to save it from the dirt of the floor. Suddenly something small and gleaming fell from the folds and rolled upon the floor.

"I'll be dingblasted!" roared Cap'n Phin. Someone swore softly. The man Si dropped to his knees. Sidney blinked.

Cap'n Phin seized the silk and unwound it. And among the countless folds he found a cunningly contrived pocket filled with hundreds of the priceless gems.

For a moment no one spoke. The daring of it all, the wealth of the glistening jewels, held each man

in the room. Cap'n Phin folded the gorgeous silk and passed it to one of the men.

"I guess this belongs to you in trust for Uncle Sam," he said gravely. "Our business is with one Jed Starrow." He turned to Sidney who was trembling violently. "Now, matie, will you tell these men how you happened to ship aboard the *Arabella* last night?"

Sidney's story tumbled out in quick, eager words and in careful detail. The men listened closely. The one who had taken the diamonds "in trust for Uncle Sam" made notes in a small black book. When she had finished Cap'n Phin nodded, his face serious.

"Reckon we'd better not question Lav Green just yet, he's pullin' out of the fog. We got enough as 'tis to hold Jed Starrow. If I ain't much mistaken he'll turn yellow when we face him and squeal on the folks higher up what's paid him to hurt the name of the Cape. That'll do for now, little gal."

Walking homeward Sidney could not speak for excitement. It had *not* been rum! It *had* been the diamonds they had sought! Their recklessness had not been in vain. Her disgrace had a sweeter flavor.

As they turned in to Sunset Lane Sidney spied Mr. Dugald ahead. He must hear the news! And he could tell her of Pola! She ran toward him, calling. At the sound of her voice he lifted his head.

"Oh, Mr. Dugald, it *was* diamonds—in that box, you know, why—" But here Sidney stopped. For

Mr. Dugald was not even hearing her, he was staring over her head at Trude.

"Oh, I forgot—this is my sister, Trude. Trude, this is Mr. Dugald, Aunt Achsa's—"

But her introduction went no farther. At sight of Trude's face she broke off abruptly. And Mr. Dugald was saying quietly:

"I know your sister, Sidney. Trude, I am more glad to see you than you can ever know!"

Sidney's brain whirled. Mr. Dugald *knew* Trude! And Trude—only once before had she seen that look on Trude's face and that had been when she had watched Trude reading a letter to Issy.

"Why—why—why—" she gasped, a great enlightenment slowly dawning over her. "You're—you're—why, you're Trude's *lost love!*"

"*Sidney!*" cried Trude, scarlet-faced.

Dugald Allan laughed. "Sidney, go in and see Lav. He's been calling for you and Miss Letty says you can see him for five minutes if you won't let him do any of the talking. I want to tell your sister a few things about you that I think she ought to know." He caught Trude's arm in a masterful way, wheeled her about and led her down the lane.

Sidney stared after them; even the excitement of the diamonds faded to nothing by the side of this amazing revelation. Mr. Dugald had known Trude all the time! He was the man who had made Trude so unhappy! He had let her talk of Trude and had

never betrayed by so much as a blush their acquaintance!

Sidney had no choice but to go on alone to the cottage. Her elation and her delight at seeing Lavender were shadowed by a growing apprehension. Mr. Dugald had promised to forget what she had told him of Trude's broken heart, but perhaps he hadn't! And he might tell Trude that he knew!

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT THE DAY HELD

"DEAR DOROTHEA, again I stand at the cross-roads, a saddened soul, and wiser—"

But Sidney could get no further than that. There was so much to tell Dorothea that she did not know how to begin. For those terrible hours on the *Arabella* she had no words; she shrank from trying to depict Lavender's splendid courage for his white face as she had seen it in the precious five minutes still haunted her. Even the diamonds lost their lustre beside Trude's ultimatum that they must go home.

Go home so ingloriously!

It was two hours since Dugald had led Trude away down the lane and Sidney's apprehension had mounted as the time had passed. She was feeling very young and very forgotten; Miss Letty who had remained at the cottage to "be handy" and to answer the stream of inquiries that came to the door, had warned her to "keep quiet" as there had been enough excitement for one day and she had been too rebuffed to even confide to Miss Letty that Mr. Dugald was someone her sister had known a few years before and that they had gone away without her.

Miss Letty was baking vigorously, her great hands moving deftly among the cupboards, her straight

back eloquently expressive of her mood. "I guess folks'll have a different opinion of Lavender Green *now,*" she muttered and as Sidney was the only person within hearing she accepted the remark as addressed to her and agreed. Miss Letty went on, shaking the flour-sifter as though she wished she were shaking someone in particular: "I guess folks like that Mrs. Allan will have a different opinion of Cape Cod. She came here and asked to see Lavender and I took her in and waited outside the door—"

"Oh, what did she say?" begged Sidney.

"She offered him money! Well, I thought the boy'd have a relapse on the spot. And I walked in and took her by the arm and led her out and I said to her: 'Madam, we on Cape Cod do not sell our bravery—we *give* it!' I said just that. And she withered like a limp leaf. She sort of clung to me and cried like a baby. Yes, she'll know now what sort o' breed we Cape Coders are."

Even that Sidney could not record in Dorothea.

She began to pack because it was the occupation best suited to her mood and because from the window of her room she could see Trude and Mr. Dugald the moment they turned the corner by Mart's house. She spread her scant belongings over the bed and set the old satchel on the rush-bottomed chair. She was in the act of folding the precious cherry crêpe de chine when she spied approaching figures—Trude and Mr. Dugald, walking slowly. Her heart gave a quick

bound only to grow cold at the sight of Trude's chin which was set stubbornly in a way that Sidney well knew! Nor did Mr. Dugald appear the happy lover; he walked with bent face and occasionally kicked at the flowers that edged the lane.

Trude sought Sidney directly and nodded with approval when she saw the packing. She sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Sid," she began in a queer voice that Sidney had never heard before. "I suppose I ought to tell you how I happened to know—Dugald Allan."

Trude spoke so slowly and with such difficulty that Sidney hastened to make it easier for her.

"I do know. You met him at the Whites three winters ago and he wrote something. I overheard you and Issy talking once but I didn't hear his name and I saw you crying over a letter—"

Trude laughed shakily.

"Sidney, you're simply the limit! Yes, I met him there that first winter I went to visit Aunt Edith. His father and Mr. White are old friends and he was staying at Aunt Edith's while he painted a portrait of one of Aunt Edith's friends. I was just a silly, countrified girl and—I didn't understand lots of things and thought—well, there's no use, now going into all that. I lost my head and let myself think things that weren't so—"

Sidney interrupted, impatiently. "Trude, you talk to me as though I was a baby and couldn't hear

the truth. I guess I know; you fell in love with Mr. Dugald and you thought he was in love with you—"

"Thank you, Sid. Yes, I *had* forgotten your extreme age. I fell in love with—him. I am not ashamed to admit it. I had never known anyone like him before. And I thought—yes, that— There was another girl there, Sylvia Thorn, from Atlanta. She was very pretty and she and Dugald were great pals and one day Aunt Edith told me she hoped they would marry, that it would be a very nice match for Dugald, a relief to his family, that he needed that type of girl to cure him of his queer ways. I remember just what she said. 'You understand, my dear, *you* have lived with genius yourself.' It wasn't exactly *what* she said, it was the way she said it, as though she thought I would know because *I* lived entirely out of Dugald Allan's class. It hurt cruelly. It made me sensitive and made me see little things between Dugald—and Sylvia. And it made me see myself as someone quite unworthy of—Dugald. I found some pretext to go home. I thought by running away from it all I could forget. Dugald wrote a few times—then that letter telling me that he was going on a six months' painting cruise in the South Seas with Sylvia Thorn and her father and mother and wanted to run up to Middletown to tell me something before he went. I wrote back that he must not come that I—could not—see him. That's all."

Sidney was listening with clasped hands, a color

on her cheeks that matched Trude's, stars in her eyes. With magic swiftness her romantic soul was piecing together a beautiful picture.

"Why, that *can't* be all! How could you have written to him like that! And he wasn't in love with that Sylvia, was he?"

Trude's eyes softened. "N—no. I know now. He told me—today. Sylvia was engaged at the time to his best friend, but they wanted it kept secret for awhile. Dugald thought I knew."

"Then—then—" cried Sidney. But, somehow, she could not ask Trude what had happened during the afternoon, something new in Trude's dear eyes plainly warned her that just now all that was too much her own to be shared with anyone.

Instead she threw her arms around Trude and hugged her violently.

"Oh, Trude, how I love you! And it's so good to be with you. Out there—on the boat—I kept thinking of you and how safe I always feel with you—how I *need* you! I don't ever want to feel grown-up again and independent, I don't care *how* old I am—"

Trude kissed the tousled head. "You've said just what I wanted to hear, dear," she answered softly. "And that you—need me!"

Summoning them to supper, Miss Letty stood with arms akimbo and with a satisfied eye surveyed the good things she had prepared. That Mr. Dugald

was at the hotel starting his aunt and cousin homeward from Provincetown, was Miss Letty's one regret. Sidney sniffed rapturously at everything, begging that Trude sit next to her. The old kitchen gleamed golden in the fading sunlight, a fragrance of flowers and sea-air and pines came on the breeze that wafted in through the wide-opened doors and windows. Aunt Achsa, her smiling self again, fluttered around in anxious concern as to Trude's welfare. A great happiness held the little group. Though Lavender's chair was empty Lavender was better—Lavender would get well!

After supper, while they still lingered over the empty plates, the voices of men came from the lane.

"More folks askin' after Lav," declared Miss Letty with pride.

Cap'n Davies himself halted before the door and nodded to the women inside. Back of him stood the men Sidney had met that morning at Rockman's and back of them Mr. Dugald, smiling, and back of him many others, curious and excited. What *ever* had happened!

Cap'n Davies wore his most important air.

"I'm here to see one Lavender Green and one Sidney Romley."

"Phin Davies, you know Lav Green's flat on his back," retorted Miss Letty brusquely but smiling. It seemed to Sidney, standing close to Trude, that everyone was smiling.

Mr. Dugald pushed into the room.

"Doctor Blackwell says that it won't hurt Lav for me to carry him in!" And without another word he rushed off to Lav's room and returned almost instantly with the boy in his arms. He put him carefully in Aunt Achsa's rocker and then stood close to him.

Cap'n Phin cleared his throat an extra number of times. Having done this to his satisfaction he drew a blue slip of paper from a leather pocketbook and held it high.

"In the name of Truro and Wellfleet counties I take great pleasure in presenting to Lavender Green and Sidney Romley this reward for the capture of—"

He never did finish his speech. His voice was drowned in loud hurrahs that echoed and reechoed down the lane and brought Gran'ma Calkins and Mart and Tillie Higgins in a great hurry to Achsa Green's.

Sidney's face flamed.

"Oh, *I* don't want it!" she cried. "It's Lav's. Honestly. He really found out about the diamonds. I—I just—"

Everyone looked at Lavender, whose face had gone even whiter. Against it his eyes shone big and black. He seemed to straighten in the old chair and his poor shoulders took on a fine dignity.

"*I*—didn't—want—any—money," he answered in a voice so weak that it was scarcely anything more than a whisper.

But here the practical Miss Letty, who had taught Mrs. Allan her lesson on Cape Cod folks, took charge of matters.

"Well, you can do a whole lot with money, Lav Green. As long as the two counties decided it was worth that much to run down these smugglers I reckon you've earned it. And I want you men to go away from here and spread the word over the whole of Cape Cod that in that crooked body of Lav Green's is a heart that's as brave as the bravest and ambition, too. Folks have gotten to think he's a loafer because he wouldn't go to school, but they'll come to know he isn't and you can tell them Letty Vine knows for she's taught him herself and he knows as much and more than any boy his age! And now—well, you *watch* Lav Green! That's all I can say. Some day you men will hear about him and remember this day and be awful proud!"

Miss Vine had to stop to swallow something in her throat. Cap'n Phin forgot entirely the nice phrases he had practiced for the occasion. His men shuffled slowly out of the room, some of them coughing and others covertly wiping their eyes.

Mr. Dugald and Doctor Blackwell and Cap'n Phin and Martie and Gran'ma Calkins remained. Mart and Sidney were excitedly examining the little slip of paper that meant five thousand whole dollars, not with any coveting, for Mart was as vehement as Sidney in disclaiming any share in the reward.

It was Lav's. But for Lav's risking everything to swim to shore no one might have known anything about Jed Starrow's connection with the persistent smuggling.

"Oh, where *is* Jed Starrow?" Sidney suddenly asked and Cap'n Phin told her Jed Starrow was in jail.

"It'll be a lesson to him and others like him," he continued, sternly. "Betrayin' the honor of the Cape! And him born and brought up on it!"

Sidney felt a moment's regret that *anyone* had to be in jail. Then she forgot it in everyone's interest as to what Lavender would do with so much money. They pressed him on every side, heedless of Doctor Blackwell's warning that the boy should not be unduly excited.

Lav's eyes found Aunt Achsa's smiling face.

"Get Aunt Achsa an oil stove," he answered promptly. "And—and lots of things. And books. And—" his eyes kindled. But he broke off abruptly. He was going to say that now he could go to school in one of the big cities where folks did not notice other folks who were "different." But he did not say it, he did not want to spoil Aunt Achsa's joy.

Sidney understood and, reaching out, squeezed one of Lavender's hands.

Doctor Blackwell ordered his patient back to bed. Martie took Gran'ma Calkins home. With much

handshaking Cap'n Phin took his leave. Miss Letty and Trude and Sidney briskly cleared away the dishes.

"I feel as though I had lived ten years since I heard those men pounding on Steve Blackwell's door," declared Miss Letty, piling the plates with a clatter.

"Oh, ten! A *hundred!* I didn't know anyone *could* live so fast all at one time!" agreed Sidney solemnly. "Sometimes I think I'm just dreaming and will wake up and find that nothing's happened. I won't mind going home now for I'll have so much to think about!"

"Going home?" gasped Aunt Achsa. "Why—why—"

Dugald Allan, coming from Lavender's room, interrupted them.

"I beg to report that your millionaire nephew is resting quietly and is in fine shape." Sidney noticed with a little glow of feeling how quickly Mr. Dugald's eyes sought Trude's. And she thought Trude cruel to look away!

Miss Vine persuaded Aunt Achsa to go to bed and then said good-night herself. Her "ten years" had left her fatigued. Dugald Allan walked as far as the lane with her then came back, remembering suddenly that he was carrying two letters in his pocket.

"In the excitement I nearly forgot them," he apologized. He drew them out. Both were for

Trude and had been forwarded by special delivery from Long Island. One was from Vick and one from Issy.

"Oh, open them quickly," begged Sidney.

Trude's hand trembled as she held Issy's envelope. "I'm—almost afraid to. I *know* it's silly—but so much has happened today that—I don't think—I could bear—anything more!"

CHAPTER XXV

NO ONE LAUGHS LAST

TRUDE read Issy's letter aloud, not noticing in her high pitch of anxiety that Dugald Allan had lingered.

" —I am going to tell something now concerning which I have given no hint in my former letters. It's something that means so much to me that I have not dared write about it until it was decided. And now it is decided. Professor Deering has asked me to stay on with him as his secretary. And I have accepted. The salary will not be so very big though it will seem big to me and I am happy among books and bookish people and working right here in the college will give me opportunities I never had before.

" But Trude dear, I feel like a deserter! To think that I who used to preach the loudest of our duty to Dad's memory and the tradition of his genius should be the first to break from it! I believe now that Sidney, that morning she had her little flare-up and we promised her the Egg, broke down restraints that have been holding us all. Certainly, ever since then, rebellious thoughts have been growing in me. I have come to see our lives differently and to believe that we've been silly. We thought we had to go on living the same kind of lives we led when Dad was with

us, that we had to submerge our own personalities to his because his was so great. Maybe the League frightened us into thinking that; they bought us or thought they did. But Trude, they *couldn't!* They can buy the house and the atmosphere and Dad's coat and chair and pens and all that but they can't buy Dad's children! Dad wouldn't want it that way. Why, we are his greatest creation and our lives are his gift to us and he would want us to make something fine of those gifts—something that would be our own. Sidney said that she wanted to be something besides Joseph Romley's daughter and that was simply her real self crying for escape. I hope the dear child has found it in a happy summer and has had her fill of the adventure she craved.

" Happy as I am I cannot bear thinking of leaving you with the responsibilities of Vick and Sidney and the League, except that you have always carried the responsibility anyway. But it seems too much for even shoulders like yours. So I've been making schemes. Vick will be sure to marry soon, bless her pretty face, and then with my salary and the royalties we can send Sidney away to school and you can plan something for yourself just as I have done. It's a wonderful feeling, Trude, I am just beginning to live! I don't mind a bit now thinking of being an old maid—"

Trude folded the letter, suddenly conscious of her listeners. Sidney caught at it as though to make

certain it had actually been written by her sister Isolde.

"Think of it, Trude! A hope-to-die secretary with a salary! I do believe it's old Issy who's going to laugh last."

"What do you mean Sidney?" asked Trude; but she did not wait for Sidney to answer. Her thoughts were elsewhere. "I believe Issy *has* torn a veil from us all. We *were* silly. We held to the ties of Dad as a poet and were losing the sweet real ones of him as a father. Of course he'd want us—the father part of him—to live our own lives, make of them what we can—"

"*Would he?*" cried Dugald Allan from his corner. And at the sound of his voice Trude started, her face flushing crimson. "Then, Trude Romley, will you please withdraw that answer you gave me out on the breakwall? It can't hold good now."

"Oh, *hush!* Don't! Not here—now—"

Sidney, alert to some deeper meaning, took up his question.

"What answer?" she demanded.

Mr. Dugald threw his arm about her shoulder. "Sid, I asked your sister to marry me. You see I found out that you needed a big brother, someone with a stern eye and a hard heart and I rather want the job. And that's the only way I can think of. And she says she cannot, that she must keep the little household together in return for what the League

has done and cook and sew and sweep and keep accounts. I think there was a lot more—"

Sidney threw out an imploring hand to her sister.

"Oh, Trude, *please!* I *do* need a big brother. And Mr. Dugald's grand! And rich. Pola said so. And *dear.* And it'd be such fun having him in the family! I'll go away to school and Vick can work and we can give the old house over to the League. Issy *said* they couldn't buy us! And—why, there are just loads of women trying to get Mr. Dugald—"

"Sidney Romley, *stop!*" Trude stamped her foot in confused exasperation. She refused to meet Dugald's yearning eyes.

"No League can mortgage your heart or your happiness!" he pleaded softly. "It belongs to you —to give—"

"I object to being courted in this—public—manner," Trude broke in, her hands flying to her face. But Dugald Allan caught the surrender in her eyes. He seized her hand.

"All right. We'll go out in the garden. Excuse us, Sid. When I come back I think I'll be your big brother."

Sidney's eyes followed them longingly until they disappeared behind a hedge of hollyhocks. She wanted to laugh and to cry all at once she was so strangely happy; her girl heart stirred with a vicarious thrill to the look she had seen in Trude's face. Well, Trude would laugh last! Dear old Trude.

Trude a bride when everyone had thought that she would never marry, just because she had no beaus like Vick or languishing poets like Issy.

Sidney stood still in the center of the dusk gray room. She did not know what she wanted to do next —or even think of. She would like to plan the wedding at once with herself as a beautiful bridesmaid in shimmery white and Mart and Pola and Lavender and Aunt Achsa there to see, and she would like just to think of Mrs. Milliken's face when she heard about everything and—

Suddenly her eyes fell upon Vick's forgotten letter. What had Vick written? No ordinary letter could come on this momentous day! Perhaps Vick had written that she had eloped—she had read that sometimes even nice girls did that, girls oppressed by things like the League. She opened the letter without any hesitation and carried it to the door that she might read it by the fading light.

It was not neatly margined like Issy's; the big letters raced slantwise across the page. Nor was it wordy, rather straight to the point.

"Dear old girls everybody: You'll die. Godmother Jocelyn's a good sort, in spite of her lace and her lap-dog. She's going to take me around the world! She says that as long as we're this far we might as well go all the way. It isn't the cherry blossoms and the rickshaws and the southern moons alone that thrill me—we're going with the peppiest

family from Chicago—some people we met on the train. A father, a mother, a girl my age—*AND*—a very nice brother! *Nicest yet!* But am I a pig? Yes. To leave my sisters there under Mrs. Milliken's thumb! But you'll forgive me, won't you? Do you remember how we used to play going to China? *And I'm going!*"

Sidney drew a long breath. She wished she were not alone. She wanted to shout or something. "Well!" she cried softly. "*No* one laughs loudest! I guess—the whole family of Romley—laughs *together* long—and—loud!"

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